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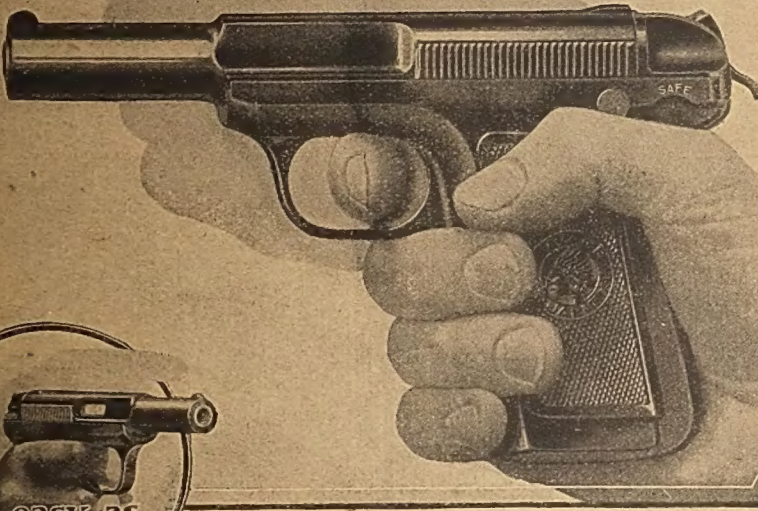
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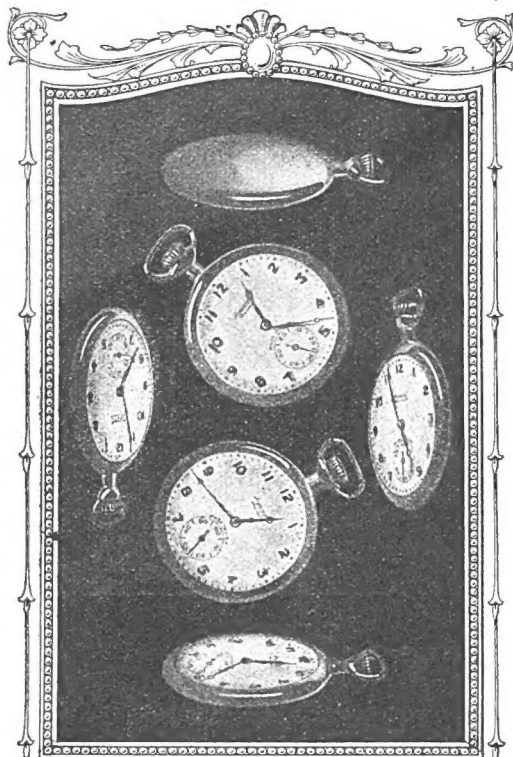
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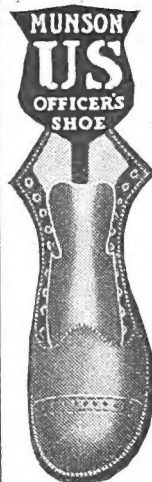
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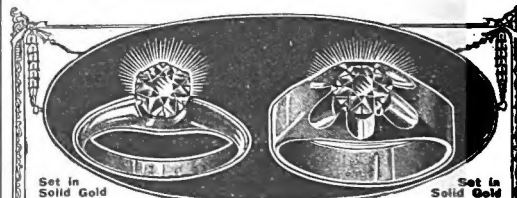
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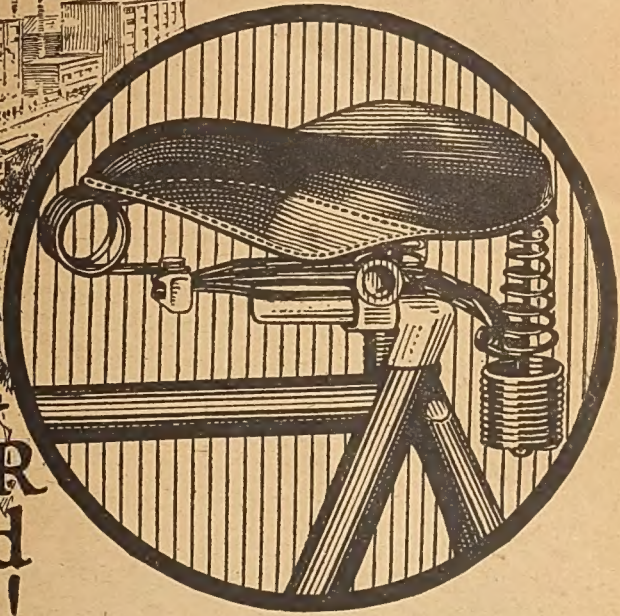
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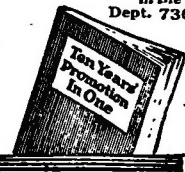
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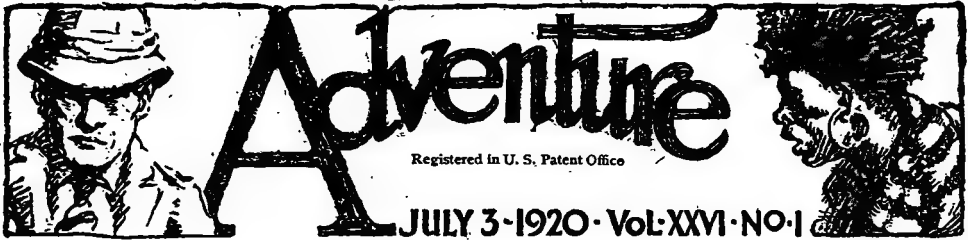
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*Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.

THREE complete novelettes in the next *Adventure*: *Khlit*, one-time leader of the Tatar Horde, acts as escort for "the dead who have not died;" and hard on his trail rides the avenger. "Law of Fire," by Harold Lamb; a tale of the Kashmir hills in 1609.

INDISCREETLY *Captain Fosdyke* recites to the pleasant stranger nearly the whole of his ship's manifest—such a freight as "would have made an old-time East Indiaman dribble water at the teeth." Later *Captain Fosdyke* wishes many times that he had kept his own counsel; but then it is too late. "The Theft of the *Kalthumpian*," by Frank H. Shaw; a tale of modern piracy.

"HASHKNIFE" HARTLEY blazes a path of lovingkindness through a cow country that believes in shooting first and investigating afterward. In "Hashknife—Philanthropist," W. C. Tuttle tells for the first time a story which is as full of mystery and excitement as it is of humor.

The Adventure

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War-Cloth

*A Complete
Novel*

by
**J. ALLAN
DUNN**



Author of "Salt of the Sea," "The Sign of the Skull," etc.

CHAPTER I

WIZARD AND CHIEF

THE tropic sun, at zenith, sent its rays down through the limpid waters of the lagoon, revealing every detail of its aqueous world to the observer in the small canoe that drifted above its own reflected image, propelled by an occasional movement of a paddle, gentle, deft as the turn of a fin. The wimpling drag of the out-rigger was the only flaw on the emerald surface.

Talofah, its flinty heights rising in gray spires above motionless forest, bush and shoreland palm, lay like an enchanted island in the spell of noon, afloat between the sea and a sky without wind or cloud, the deep, luminous sapphire born of league upon league of untroubled ether.

The blended balm of flower and herb and sweet-leaved vine surcharged the still air. The birds were silent; there was no smoke of fire nor sound of song nor chatter, no motion of man nor beast, save for the figure of the man in the canoe, and one other, high on a cliff near where a thready waterfall droned down to the beach, asquat in the shadow of a broad-leaved tree; Taku the wizard watching Upolu the chief.

It was very hot and very quiet; the everlasting drum-roll of the surf on the reef, the soft hiss of the lazy tide on the sand and the murmur of the waterfalls, made up the only sound. In the moist shade of the tree Taku's slightly bloodshot eyes glittered, as, motionless upon his haunches, he noted every movement of Upolu.

Sweat broke out upon him in a dew and trickled down into his eyes but he only

winked away the salty, smarting drops, every energy conserved for his mental effort, the will that something untoward might happen to Upolu.

If Upolu had not been first a chief, and secondly the kind of man he was, Taku would have practised upon him his elemental sorcery of praying-to-death. That was very simple, as a rule. Taku, by birth, by arduous initiation, was accredited with the ability to control supernatural powers. He would tell his victim with a convincing confidence born of many trials that he—the victim—was going to die.

With that idea firmly implanted in his mind, the victim found that every one was quite sure that his demise was imminent; they looked upon him as one doomed and whispered among themselves as to his decreasing vigor.

Soon the victim's brain was filled with this one idea, fixed and enlarging to the exclusion of everything else; the failing will ceased to coordinate with his nervous system, he grew languid, his digestion failed and, as he wilted, the disintegration of mind and flesh grew apace so that presently he turned his face to the grass wall of his hut and ceased to be.

The psychology of this was as Greek to Taku. Vaguely he believed himself heaven-born, imbued with strange powers, but these were so intricately interwoven with the mummery of his age-old profession that he dared not omit any part of his devilish rituals lest in them, rather than in his will, lay the success of his conjuring.

Upolu too was heaven-born, descended from the ancient chiefs, and therefore of different stuff than the islanders, who might not wear the necklace made of the scarlet feathers of the bird forbidden to all but royalty. And Taku feared that, if it came to open issue between Upolu and himself, if he could trump up some charge and penalize Upolu by telling him he was to be prayed-to-death, that Upolu would first laugh in his face, perhaps beat him to a jelly and, most certainly, make a vigorous attempt to oust Taku from his high office.

Upolu was loved by the majority of the islanders of Talofah, Taku feared by them, and the wizard was not certain of the outcome between the two emotions if Upolu became leader of the opposing faction.

Sometimes, when the vitality of those he was praying-to-death proved too stubborn,

Taku used other means. These involved more complicated rites and in Upolu's case he was not yet ready to try them. Later, when hate mastered fear and discretion, he might risk it. At present he stewed in the bubbling caldron of his own enmity and hoped with all the power of his rampant evil that accident might remove his rival.

Upolu now sat between canoe and outrigger, balanced on the thwart, his legs a-trail in the water, "taking his wind" with deeply measured breathing that made the great cage of his ribs rise and fall in a seven-inch expansion. The canoe was over the place he desired it to be.

The bottom was a little over twenty fathoms. From it rose unwaveringly a seawood of green and purple and amber growths, some tubed and jointed like bamboo, others feathery, flat-ironded like moose-horns, or grassy, some thickly podded with air-enclosing blisters that acted as buoys.

All were erect, fully expanded, every filament flamboyant. Through this forest shot shoals of fish of every hue and shape, triggerfish liveried in gold and azure, crimson gurnards, spotted globe-fish, lancet-like forms of silver and banded eels that looked like variegated ribbons as they snaked their way through the groves.

There were spiky hedges of living coral and clumps of sponge, with sea-fans, scarlet starfish, purple sea-urchins, a tropic medley of life and death, each preying on each, the greater on the less, the visible on the invisible.

In none of these was Upolu interested. He saw only a ledge upon which clustered a bed of oysters, their valves apart, draining the water of animalculæ through their beards. Their location, over nineteen fathoms down, was not the best and they were not prime shell-fish. In their semi-invalidism, in their rough shells, lay their value.

These sickly bivalves, too close to the bottom sands, living under too much pressure for perfect health, were overready with secretions and, given the intruding grain, responded with a copious flow of nacre that meant a high percentage of pearls.

Correspondingly with their worth was the danger of their gathering. Below sixteen fathoms the native diver, unprotected with any device, risks his life, not only from the lurking monsters of the deep, but from the frightful stress of tons of water squeezing

his frame, the threat that "sand-hogs," working in the borings of submarine tunnels, dread as the "bends."

A foot or more, groping for shells of promise, and the return to the surface means collapse, as, in major degree, deep-sea fish come up in the dredges. A very few experts take the risk of eighteen fathoms and do not take it long. The man who dives below that must have the skeleton of a giant and be sound to the core.



SUCH was Upolu, physically perfect, a son of the sun, nurtured on island foods that, all unwittingly to the feeders, furnished a balanced ration, developed to the utmost by exercise on land and in sea and, in his strength and in his desire to please Kalani, unafraid of the pressure or of the dangers of the floor of the lagoon.

He was not going to swim down, as was his custom to lesser depths. In the canoe was a heavy stone in a net of sennit twine. Claspings this, he would sink like a plummet to the ledge, loosen his shells and return, with a stream of silver bubbles in his wake, like a water-rocket to the air.

Tomorrow was the festal day of Kalani, princess of Talofah. Many presents would be brought to her and Upolu wanted to give her something that told of his own prowess, that meant courage and energy exploited for her sake, something that would surpass the other gifts.

Kalani loved pearls, loved them for their iridescent hues, their summing up of the beauty of dawn and sunset. Not for their intrinsic value. Of that she knew nothing. Talofah was too far from all trade routes to have been smirched with the evils that follow barter, the smudge that is left too often by the camp-fires of pioneer traders.

To Kalani the pearl was akin to beach-pebbles, to the shells she wore about her pretty neck, only rarer, more wonderful. And Upolu meant to find the king of pearls to offer to her, meant to dive to the perilous ledge till he should succeed in bringing up a gem that would surpass all the rest his princess treasured in her carven box of sweet sandalwood.

And Taku, toad-like in the shade, toad-like and venomous, prayed to his gods that Upolu might arise with all his tissues broken, writhing in pain, cramped, impotent, and sink before his gloating eyes. Or,

if not that, maybe a giant conch might close its bony edges on a groping arm, as the scoop of a dredge bites the mud. Or a mammoth octopus grip him with suckery tentacles. Or the tiger-shark chase him into a crevice, there to wait in the vain hope that the sea-beast would depart, wait until the water burst in through his gasping mouth and he rolled out from the sea-cave to the eager maw. All these were possibilities and Taku gloated over them while he begged his devil-gods to grant his petition.

Unaware of Taku on the cliff, Upolu lifted from the canoe his netted stone and, holding it full length, slipped over the side and sped fast down while the canoe rocked above him. Clinging to the ledge, he swiftly cleared the stone from the meshes and used the net as basket for the shells he plucked, with discrimination, for the sun made his surroundings plainly visible.

A score of the ridged shells he tore from their stronghold and then, with kicks like the clip of scissors, urged himself up to where his canoe swam like a great water-beetle, nearly a hundred and twenty feet above him. His head, its long, straight hair sleeked like a seal's, broke through, the center of rings that outcircled far to reef and beach while Taku, spitting between his feet, cursed his safe return but hoped for worse luck on the next venture.

Upolu deftly landed in his canoe with one symmetrical movement, deposited his gather of shells in the bottom and started to open them with a shark's tooth set in hardwood and bound by fiber-twine. A few seed pearls he flicked overboard, a twisted baroque he hesitated over and then set aside.

Then came blanks, mere shells and flesh, until the last. His deft fingers felt what they sought, something as big around as the end of Upolu's middle finger—the father of all pearls—radiant, opalescent, perfect! A gift fit for any monarch, a gift for Kalani.

Taku saw the upward, triumphant toss of Upolu's head and, while his face became a mask of thwarted hatred, knew that Upolu had found what he was looking for, guessed what that was and watched him paddle shoreward with strokes that sent the canoe surging through the placid water as fast as a mullet speeds from a sea-pike.

Soon he rose and went through the jungle by a narrow bush-trail to where a grass-thatched temple stood above the sea, a

gruesome place, smelling like a charnel-house, its courtyard walled with stone and set about with great poles carved with hideous, obscene images.

Inside the temple Taku hunkered down once more before an idol hewn out of lava-rock, the leering face set with eyes of shell that gazed out over an altar stone dark with the blood of countless victims. God and priest, devil-image and wizard, faced each other and presently the face of one became as the face of the other.

CHAPTER II

THE SURVIVORS OF THE RAID

TEMETERI is another island situated in the same part of the South Pacific as Talofah. It is the cooled, drowned core of a submarine volcano, thrust up hissing and steaming from the sea; buttressed by broken lava ridges that are in turn draped by lesser slopes of cinders and ashes. Flanking all this ruin, that Time has so far failed to rob of its savagery, lies the bush, the rioting bush, jungled thick as mosses grow, a wild jumble of trees and shrubs bound together with vines and hooked growths, waveringly pierced by the wild paths of wilder people, smokers of human heads and devourers of human flesh.

And the outer ring of all, where the decomposed volcanic ash lies deep, the color of dried blood, rich in fertility, is made up of cultivated lands, of plantations of coco and taro, of oranges and, on the higher benches, cacao, a ring of civilization welded about the wilderness.

The men who did this thing knew where their dominion sharply ended. Left to itself, the bush would have devoured their efforts within a year and the line of the bush marked the end of their supremacy. They did not even dare to employ on any terms the wild men of the jungle.

Instead, they recruited laborers from other islands, men of the beaches who thus worked between the devil and the deep sea, for to adventure into the bush meant torture and death, full stomachs for their captors and more heads for the rafters.

The plantation factor and those under him of his own tongue and color left the bush severely alone, save as they might clip the edge of it and reclaim a few acres at a time for the company for which they worked, a

company incorporated far overseas yet claiming these remote regions under their national flag and winning them slowly for the present profit of the few and the ultimate extension of a world-wide empire.

These men built themselves storehouses and copra sheds, offices and dwellings, wrought a lawn by strenuous endeavor and placed upon it, not altogether for show, cannon and the flag of their empire. Also there was a wireless station for communication with other far-flung islands of the same archipelago where the same flag flew, and a recreation hall where they played at pool and cards or strummed, not unmusically, a piano, while all sang songs that smacked either of overemphatic sentiment or a blatant patriotism.

But, on the day that Upolu dived and brought up the pearl, while Taku spun a web of evil in his brain, these trim dwellings were but a rubble of coral blocks and crumpled corrugated iron. The cannon were gone, the flagstaff splintered and its banner torn away, the machinery of the wireless wrecked utterly, the plantations themselves ravished in jagged patches by the flight and the explosion of shells.

A few dead bodies lay twisted on the turf, and, panting and crouching in the bush, peering out through the tangle, even while they listened and looked with the ears and eyes of those who momentarily expect attack, was a group of eleven men, clad for the most part in white drill that was stained with sweat and, here and there, with blood, ripped with thorns and evident of hasty donning.

On the horizon was a plume of smoke, spreading, vanishing; smoke from the funnels of a cruiser that had demolished the plantation and exacted vengeance for a myriad foul deeds done by the blood-brothers of the fugitives, by a nation that had thought fit to override an unsuspecting and unready world and bind its denizens forever captive to their chariot wheels.

The men were for the most part bearded, with eyes of shallow blue, round-skulled, heavy of body. Their leader held a bundle of folded papers in one hand, in the other an automatic pistol. All of them were armed and there were more rifles than men, with plenty of ammunition. They glared at the dissipating smoke with a sullen hatred. They swore among themselves in a guttural language.

"Shut up, pigheads!" said the leader in a fierce whisper. "Do you want to bring the bushmen down upon us? A devil of a chance we have against them in this mat of a jungle."

"The cruiser's gone," said another. "Let us go down to the beach."

"We can't stay there, you fool! They've left nothing—nothing! And they'll come back again. They'll make a regular patrol of it. Farani, Varua, Funa, Nukuna, they've gutted all of them! It came by wireless this morning. They are all prisoners."

"So should we be, and better off, if Stein hadn't fired on the landing party. Dumb-head!"

"That will do, Schwartz. If I——"

The leader stopped, his tanned face showing ghastly gray within his beard. The man next him had made a sudden swing at the side of his head, as if an insect bothered him. Then he gasped while his eyes rolled up and his hands twitched, stiffening for an instant, like a man stretching himself, before he slumped down among them, a tiny sliver of wood clinging in his cheek.

"Fire!" ordered the leader, recovering somewhat, even while his troubled eyes swept the impenetrable bush on each side of the tiny path that bordered the first shoulder of the uplands. "Distribute! Then down! To the beach!"

There was a flare of exploding gases and the crackle of the scattering volley, a *phut-phut* of bullets through the screen of leaves and the ten survivors, in headlong haste, thrusting forward the ones ahead, fled helter-skelter down the trail and through the cacao trees, gathering at last in a palm grove near the demolished buildings.

While they were still running, two figures, naked save for a string of bark cloth, creatures with frizzy hair, wide mouths with file teeth, loose, with retreating jaws and slanting narrow brows, stepped silently through the dense fringe of bush and stood agrin on their bowed legs.

They were not up to the shoulders of the shortest of the men they had put to flight; they grunted rather than spoke; but for their strings of bark, the disks of shell that distended their ear-lobes and the weapons they bore, they seemed more brute than human.

One set down his blowpipe and both squatted, hacking at the dead man with

bolo-shaped knives. They left the headless body for the time and, as mysteriously as they had appeared, the bush swallowed them and their dripping trophy.

"Well, what are we going to do?" asked Schwartz.

"Silence," said the man who had assumed authority. "First, I am the leader. Understand that. I am *Ober-Leutnant* in the Reserve and you are under my orders. We must act together or perish. These swine—" he swept a furious hand toward the horizon where a sepia stain still faintly showed against the blue—"are all against us. You heard what came over the wireless yesterday. Even the Americans have joined in! Pfeiffer, what is left of him, will be in the baking-pits at nightfall and his head in the smoke. That waits all of us back there in the bush. I don't know, they may get bold and creep out after us when we sleep. The — monkeys, with their darts and poisoned arrows! We've got to get out of this."

"Schwartz, take Brandt and Schoenwald and get the whale-boat out of the creek. It's lucky we sank her to tighten the seams. If she leaks too badly we've got to patch her as best we can."

He glowered at where the remains of a launch lay in the shallows, close by a splintered tender.

"The rest of us will get together what provisions we can." He glanced up at the trees with a shrug of his shoulders. "We'll start on the ebb, at twilight. There's a moon."

Schwartz saluted, thrown back to his military service.

"Where do we go, *leutnant*?" he ventured.

"It depends. There is no sail. We may rig one. These cursed currents! It depends. We can't pick and choose." He spoke jerkily, half to himself. "I managed to get these charts. But no compass! We'll fetch up somewhere."

He straightened and barked a second order at Schwartz who roared in turn at Brandt and Schoenwald and went off down the shore to retrieve the whale-boat that the men from the cruiser had overlooked.

The sun sank and Night flung a handful of glittering stars ahead of her swift coming. The core of Temeteri stood up black and menacing. The land wind rustled in the bush and swayed the plumes of the palms as

the whale-boat, six men at the oars, two baling, passed out through the reef-gate and, caught in the sweep of the shore current, running at six knots, drifted to the westward with just enough work at the oars to keep it tangented from the shore and clear the headland of the bay the men had dubbed Kaiserhaven. Fruit and taro and water constituted their provisions, the boat was low in the water with the load, and two men were always baling.

Out on the headland, where the bush thinned, wild figures looked down at them and jabbered in disappointment. Half-way up the mountain the flush of a fire showed faintly and the shore breeze wafted down to Ober-Leutnant Weissman and his companions the monotonous beat of drums.

CHAPTER III

A GIFT TO KALANI

TALOFAH is shaped a good deal like a fat crescent, the convex side facing the constant battery of the winds and the great seas that travel three hundred leagues of open water, before they break against the perpendicular precipices of Talofah's weather shore.

These cliffs are honeycombed and fissured both by fire and water, their summits cleft into fantastic pinnacles that, at dawn and sunset, with clouds trailing about them, look like some ogre's castle, conceived and built by imprisoned jinn.

At their bases the reef makes the shore rocks, a barrier of lava and basalt, not of coral, for that busy insect has merely ornamented Talofah with a fretwork that fringes the great bay on the lee side.

Talofah like Temeteri was thrust up hissing from the deep, to become, first the haunt of sea-birds, of seals and those things half fish, half bird, the penguins; later, after long centuries, a veritable Eden of the seas, garlanded with trees and flowering shrubs, rich in land-birds and gorgeous butterflies, a place of such peaceful plenty that it was named by its first inhabitants Talofah, the Land of Love.

To the lee the land runs down in terraces, with here and there wide ravines radiating from the central and highest peak. These open to the sea, giving on the great bay, some running level to the beach, others terminating in cliffs over

which streams tumble. Through these cañons, in the throats of the gorges, ever pours the wind, southwest or northeast as the monsoon comes and goes. And in these airy gulfs float armadas of cloud and long-drawn flotillas of mist in constantly changing shape and color.

Over Talofah reigns Kalani, the heaven-born, by right of lineage. Taku the wizard was her distant cousin. Upolu belonged to a different branch of the same tribe. He too was descended from the demigods, as Taku.

Generations before, on another island, before the forebears of Kalani landed on Talofah, the ancestor of Upolu had challenged the ancestor of Kalani for supremacy and the latter had won, with honor for both sides. But for many years there had been peace between the factions.

Among the South Sea archipelagoes the ancient Salic law often prevails. He is deemed a very foolish son who does not know his own mother and all family trees are based upon the maternal side. Often a woman rules—and wisely.

Taku the wizard was ambitious. In his babyhood some one had let him carelessly crawl too near a baking-pit, and, when he was rescued, howling, the tendons of one leg had been drawn by the fire so that he limped ever after on that shrunken limb that bore ghastly scars. It was no fault of his, but it set him apart from his natural playmates, handicapped him in manly sports, barred him as a warrior and forced upon him a certain solitude in which he brooded over his wrongs.

In Polynesia a man is judged by his physical perfection unless, as Taku did, he adopts the wizardry. Taku did this by inherited right, learning under his uncle Pohere, who was accredited with being able to wade the deepest waters or walk upon them, as he chose.

And Taku hid his withered leg beneath the wizard's long robes, beaten from the paper mulberry, soft and fine almost as silken loom, and stamped with weird designs, and practised to hide his lameness that people might forget it.

He was in love with Kalani, if his swift gusts of passion could be styled love. But he was far more in love with Taku and with desire to become supreme ruler of Talofah. If he could win Kalani he promised himself that, with his mastery over the

superstitious people; he would be more than a mere consort; he would be ruler.

Upolu stood in his way. Upolu loved Kalani as a man's love is born of the wish to protect, to serve, to cherish the beauty that attracts his senses. Every day Taku waited for some look in Kalani's eyes that would show him she returned the love of the young chief, and of late he deemed that he had seen signs of forthcoming surrender, unsuspected though they might be by the princess herself.

Taku believed that the gift of the pearl that Upolu had brought up from the twenty-fathom ledge would prove the talisman of their affections when it was presented to Kalani on her birthday, and he set his crafty brains to work to remove his rival.

At one horn of a minor haven of the big bay, on the morning of the festival, as soon as the sun had risen, Taku set up two wands from which the bark had been peeled in rings. These were the wands of trespass, the magic sticks of tabu, privilege of only the high chiefs. To pass them, for the common folk, meant death, under the laws of Talofah.

He crossed the white sand to the farther promontory and stuck two more into the beach at tide-mark. For the time being the place belonged to him, inviolate.

The tide was at ebb and he began to investigate the pools left in the rocks, fairy aquaria starred with anemones like sea chrysanthemums, decked with mosses pink and gold and emerald, peopled with spider crabs and multi-shaped, multi-colored fishes which hid in crevices or boldly buccaneered in the open, according to their size, their armament and the all-important difference of whether they were vegetarian or carnivorous. Life to a fish is joy or tragedy, depending upon the kind of teeth it enters life with.

Boldly occupying the center of one pool, a fish some seven inches long hovered motionless, its pectoral fins seeming to revolve like twin screws. It was a leprous-looking, hideous, misshapen thing, hardly built for speed though its powerful fins could drive it at a tremendous rate or stop its career abruptly in a quarter of its own length.

It was a sickly yellow, blotched and spotted with brown, armored rather than scaled, three-sided, flat-stomached, ridged and spined, snouted like a gar, with wicked-looking eyes fixed under bony plates. It

was the poison-fish. No man, no other fish would eat it, come within touch of it. As food its flesh was instant death, its slime was acrid.

Taku, with two small nets mounted on bamboo curves and handled with hardwood, chased the poison-fish about the rocky tank, captured it and, without handling it, deposited it, nets and all, in a calabash fitted with a cover where it viciously flopped to death while he retrieved his trespass-sticks and, tucking the calabash under one arm, concealed beneath his robe, went off to his own special den of iniquity, the devil-house.

This was a sea-cave, left above tide-level by some upheaval of the island, subsequent to its first lifting. It was high-arched and ran far back into the body of the cliff. The roof was smoke-blackened. Poles had been wedged between the walls and on them lay, wrapped in mats, the dried bodies of such strangers as had come to Talofah and had not been welcome. For the Talofans were not men-eaters.

The whole place was stuffed with bizarre objects, anything that might hold the eye as weird. Limbs and roots of trees resembling strange creatures or half-finished carvings of grotesque beings, skulls and bones of men and lesser animals, the head of a stranded whale, polished by the weather, that served Taku as a seat; a mummied baby, several ugly and obscene idols, egg-cases of the giant dogfish, an incantation drum and many calabashes.

The sandy floor was strewn with mats and under these Taku ran strings attached to certain of his curios for playing hocus-pocus with the credulous, giving them startling motion from a loop slipped over his big toes to scare the already awed visitor.

In front of the cave was a pool of fresh water, and Taku had devised an ingenious contrivance of bamboo fitted with a piston that caused great bubbles of air to rise in the pool whenever a client, or a victim, observed by Taku from a secret spy-hole, approached him.

In the farthest, darkest recess, the complete skeleton of a shark glowed with apparently supernatural light, the chief fetish of the place, for Taku was popularly supposed to be under the protection of the shark god and he religiously applied certain phosphorescent fungi to the bones of his tutelary deity with fine effect.

Once again he set up his trespass-sticks as

warning that no callers were permitted. He shook out the poison-fish, stubbornly dying, still gasping but inert, and, using twigs for fingers, set it belly up, propped with small stones, upon a board that slanted toward the direct rays of the sun.

It would not take long for the virulent thing to fester in that heat, to swell to a mass of venom. Taku grinned as he surveyed his handiwork and then broke some branches from a thorny tree that partly shadowed the entrance to the cave. It was of the acacia species, and sharp spikes, gradually diminishing from bough to branch and branch to twig, were plentiful. Taku divided the lesser twigs from the rest, stripped them of leaves and placed them near the fish.

Later, the dried thorns, dipped in the rotting flesh of the poison-fish and stepped on by a careless foot, would mean one less in the population of Talofah with absolute and impetuous certainty. Once more he grinned and emitted a dry chuckle.

Then, still leaving his trespass-sticks erect, he walked down the beach to where the sound of music, of beaten drums, Pan-pipes and nose-flutes mingling with the harmony of human voices, announced that the fiesta of Kalani's birthday was already in progress.



THE Summer palace of Kalani lay open to the weather, set in a clearing naturally turfed, surrounded by papayas and breadfruit groves, facing a level stretch of beach and the reef-gate to the lagoon. The shade-mats were all rolled up between the carven timbers that supported the thatched roof and, between the king-posts of the entrance, stood Kalani, receiving her gifts.

Within, the finely woven mats that covered the raised floor, neatly tessellated with flat pebbles chosen one by one from the beaches, were already piled high with tribute, much of which would return to the donors by way of their stomachs. For what use is a gift that can not give pleasure to both donor and recipient?

The bird-catchers had brought her necklaces and bracelets of bright feathers, with singing-birds in reed cages, with a short cloak of iridescent plumage as a joint gift from their guild. From the foresters came hand-polished bowls of wood, a carven chest of the heart of sandal and two exquisitely balanced canoe paddles. The tillers and the fishers brought the fruits of land and sea

while the maidens had woven a thousand garlands of bloom and sweet-scented greenery.

The food, duly acknowledged, would go into the baking-pits, the wreaths would later be redistributed among the guests by Kalani herself. Others had brought her rare shells made into bracelets and necklaces; there were combs for her hair wrought from the hawkbill turtle; there were fans and mats and lengths of tissue from the paper mulberry.

But three out of all Talofah had failed in tribute—Upolu, Taku and Vaega, head handmaiden to Kalani, mistress of the robes and of the wielders of fans and the feathered fly-chasers. Upolu was still absent, as was Taku. Vaega stood apart, glowering, sulky, waiting Upolu's coming.

It is hard to describe Kalani as she stood between the carven king-posts. She was slender and she was regal, she was proud and she was gracious. Her skin was golden with all the sheen of satin, flawless. Her nose was straight, her eyes large and lustrous; her glossy hair, slightly waving, hung down farther than the extremities of her fingers at the full length of her arms.

Her lips were scarlet as the hibiscus she wore tucked in front of each tiny, well-shaped ear. Her hands and feet, the latter naked on the mats, might well have been the envy of patricians of a whiter race. She was clothed in white paper-cloth, draped as a Grecian might have arranged the folds, the firm round of her left breast showing beneath the wreaths of flowers about her neck, her slim arms bare, a loose girdle of iridescent shells girdling her.

She ever smiled as with queenly tact she greeted each of the donors by name with some special word for the occasion. If sometimes her dark eyes shifted in search of some one she never failed the moment.

Under the shadow of the trees, cross-legged and standing, was the orchestra, following the soloists as they improvised for the occasion, accentuating the chorus as they emphasized the lines.

"A gift, a gift for the princess!
The forest and the sea give tribute.
Gracious is Kalani to the givers;
One thinks that she is the donor!

Our princess, Kalani!

"Like the flash of the surf on the reef,
On the reef, when the sunshine makes rainbows,
Painting the spray with the colors of sunset;
So is the smile of the princess—

Of the princess, Kalani!

"The sigh of the breeze in the forest;
The coo of the doves at their mating;
The murmur of streams in the fernlands;
That is the voice of Kalani.
Oh, sweet is the voice of Kalani!"

"Who brings a gift that is worthy?
See, Taku the wizard approaches.
He has a gift for Kalani;
A gift that the gods have made precious;
A gift that is worthy our princess."

Taku, hiding his limp, conscious of the way made for him by the crowd, strode up to the entrance. As he came on he looked for Upolu and, missing him, was vexed that the chief had got the better of him by delaying his gift. But he himself was committed and he put a smiling face upon it.

His present was a dainty enough affair—two prismatic shells about the size of a dollar, deeply incurved, pierced in a lace-like pattern with their edges cemented together with gum. Within, certain small objects, not to be clearly distinguished, rattled sharply when the amulet was moved. It was highly polished and formed the pendant of a string of scarlet beads, the seeds of a tree.

"It is a charm against all evil, Kalani," he said; "against sickness or malice, against enemies and their weapons, against the waves of the sea and the creatures that live in it."

Kalani took the pretty thing, admiring it, then slipping the beads over her head to settle about her neck amid the wreaths already there. She tinkled the amulet at Taku.

"I thank you, Taku. Would you then have me live forever?"

"Aye, if I too could live."

It was the first time that Taku had hinted at any open declaration. Kalani's instincts had warned her of his admiration long ago but she had not looked for such open speech as this. The blood mounted to her cheeks at the publicity of it and her eyes challenged his.

Taku's eyes were glazed with passion, the whites injected with blood; they were the eyes of an animal, not of a man, filled with a bestial ferocity. But Kalani faced them and outlooked them while in her own gaze gathered such a quality of contempt as maddened the wizard. From the singers came announcement of another visitor bearing gifts.

"Upolu the mighty warrior, Upolu the fighter!
Upolu, climber of cliffs, who dives in the deeps!
Upolu who drives a canoe as swift as a shark can travel;
What brings he to Kalani?
What brings he to our princess?"

Taku saw the face of Kalani soften and brighten as if a lamp had been lighted behind the golden transparency of her flesh. Her eyes grew limpid and forgot Taku, passing beyond him to where Upolu was striding through the press. All the wickedness of the wizard came to a boil and his brain was as filled with the scum of his devil-brew as the poison-fish putrefying on the slab in the sun was full of venom. He stepped aside into the crowd that strove to catch a glimpse of Upolu's gift.



THERE is far more difference between certain tribes of Oceania than there is between a Digger Indian and a Pawnee chieftain. An even vaster gap exists between a bushman of Guadalcanar, for example, and a Samoan. No one who has seen a man of Savaii come striding down his wood paths, bearing a great log on one shoulder with consummate ease, well over six feet, symmetrical, graceful, powerful; no one who knows his courtesy, his prowess in war or peace, can doubt that he is representative of a high form of civilization, far from its original base, without doubt changed by environment, but of high type.

Anthropology still sputters much, without agreement, concerning the Polynesian and Melanesian migrations and can not read the riddle of the mammoth statues on Easter Island, while talking mysteriously of pre-Malayan races.

Upolu might have passed for an Arab, with his straight features. But few Arabs would measure up to him. He was two inches over six feet in height and his relaxed chest measured forty-seven inches. His shoulders were in proportion, set horizontal to the body and stalwart neck. His waist would have taped at thirty-two. His legs would have delighted the trainer of long-distance runners.

In arms and legs the muscles were long, sliding in their sheaths like ropes in well greased blocks. They were massed on his shoulders; later on they might become interlocked and muscle-bound from too much paddling, but they formed a tremendously

powerful battery. His stomach was ridged and lean; the man was in perfect condition. He wore sandals of ceremony, woven from banana tissue.

Taku stole a look at those sandals. They did not disconcert him. He knew that Upolu wore them only upon occasions. The poisoned thorns were intended for his bare soles and all Taku lacked was the charm that would compel Upolu to tread upon them, prevent in any way the miscarriage of his idea.

For he was not yet absolutely certain that he would murder Upolu. It would stir things up and there were certain risks of discovery. Moreover he needed an accomplice to procure for him a certain ingredient for his charm, without which he would not run the hazard, could not indeed, in his own belief, mazed with rituals considered indispensable, succeed.

And then he caught sight of Vaega, her bold eyes shifting from Upolu to Kalani. He read their secret and edged over toward her. Here was his accomplice, one that would be personally interested in the outcome and so self-sworn to secrecy.

Upolu, beside the sandals, wore only a kilt of paper-cloth about his loins with a single ornament, a wide, blunt hook of yellow ivory, carved from the tooth of a whale and suspended by a chain of woven human hair, emblem of his high-chieftood. As he stood in front of the princess and tendered her his gift, the great pearl, extended on the palm of his hand, the full sunlight brightened his clear skin to the hue of a freshly hulled chestnut. He stood magnificent, a Hector of the South Seas.

Kalani exclaimed at the beauty of the pearl and the others gathered round. Only Taku and Vaega marked the droop of her lashes and their swift raising in a new shyness as she thanked Upolu. She broke off her own embarrassment by clapping her hands as a signal for the feast.

There was a scattering of cooks and waiters to the baking-pits and steamy savors rose appetizingly as the wet mats were raised from pigs and pigeons, fish and shell-fish, turtle meat and yams and taro. Mats were set upon the beach and, chattering and hungry, the natives ranged themselves in precedence of rank while Kalani passed among them and dropped over each head a fragrant garland from the pile bestowed upon her.

Only one person was undecorated and that was Vaega. The girl, of riper, more sensuous beauty than her royal mistress, sat sullen under the apparent snub while the whisper passed round that Vaega had been the only one to bring no gift. Taku, in the group of the high ones, hugged his spirit. One of the wizard's choicest weapons was jealousy and he knew it was flaming higher every moment in Vaega's voluptuous breast. But he bided his time.

CHAPTER IV

A SOUTH-SEA SAGA

THE *hula* of Hawaii, the *siva*-dance of Samoa, the *souruka* of farther Melanesia are the expressions of a people intensely dramatic, poetic, musical. The dancers were the royal players, pantomimists of high merit; the chanters, often improvising on their themes, are no mean orators.

The traveling public, seeing in Honolulu some wretched remnant of lost ceremonial, imagines the *hula* to be a lascivious dance, knowing nothing of the fasting, the cleansing ceremonials and the strict discipline that in olden times preceded days of pantomime and song and only after the real program was completed lapsed into a frank expression of the feeling engendered by freedom from restraint and unlimited food and drink. That tag-end of bygone dignities is the travesty foisted on the tourist of today.

At certain high-feasts on Talofah the chief saga of the island, the legend of the arrival of the tribe upon that little Eden, was always performed. Current events of importance were also given in like manner but the story of the War-Cloth was ever the main event.

The pantomimist dancers, men and women both, sat cross-legged, using their swaying bodies, their graceful arms and hands, their expressive features in wonderful precision, indicating joy and sorrow, storm and peace, sickness, battle, love, the rhythmic sweep of paddles on a long voyage, the pangs of hunger, madness, jealousy; all the gamut of human passion and action in a manner that strikingly accentuated the story chanted by the soloist and emphasized on certain lines by the dancers, while drums beat out the measure, nose-flutes and Pan-pipes shrilled and gourd rattles were shaken in an ensemble picturesquely classic.

Kalani sat enthroned on high-piled mats, a carven sandalwood chest in front of her, awaiting the moment when she should herself take the rôle of central figure in the drama. With her were Upolu, Taku and other chiefs, their women winging them on either side.

First came a comedy, mocking the love affairs of a notoriously wife-ridden chief who had lately acquired a young girl, only to find her the greatest shrew of all his *enlourage*. The sly hits, the imitations, set the crowd in laughing mood that hushed when the director of the dance, decked out with cockatoo feathers and shells, strode down the line of audience, fiercely ordering silence.

Silence fell; the drums started, slowly at first, then in an iteration that stirred the blood while the flutes and pipes came in at intervals and the dancers took their places in two seated rows and the soloist, a man with a magnificent barytone voice, commenced:

"This is a song of Talofah—
Talofah, the Island of Love;
That is set in the midst of the sea
As a pearl that lies in a pool.
Oh, Talofah the pearl!

"This is a song to the gods—
To the gods of the o'er-arching heavens;
The gods, whose glance is the lightning;
Whose frown is the storm;
Whose breath is the gale;
And whose voice is the terrible thunder.
Oh, the voice of the gods!

"This is the song of the day
Alas, the day!

"When the high gods were angered.
Alas, the offender!

"They frowned and the sun was veiled.
The sky grew black as at midnight;
The stars were blown out.
Oh, the darkness!

"The lightning came down from the heavens
That shook with the terrible thunders.
The mountains took fire
And the earth was aflame.
Alas, the gods in their anger!

"The forests fell down, and the ocean
Came up and devoured the land;
Like a shark that swallows a man
It was lost in the maw of the ocean.

"Only the king, Tarua,
Only the priest Sutui,
They and a pitiful few
Who prayed to the gods and found mercy;
Only these two were saved—

"Flung on the crest of a billow;
Flung like a leaf in a storm;
Flung out to sea like a bird
That is swept by the gale from the headland.

"Fearful the voice of the wind!
Harsh was the lot of Tarua.
Harsh was the lot of Sutui.
Yet there were others who perished."

So it went on in vivid presentment, this South-Sea tragedy of the volcanic outburst accompanying the hurricane that devastated the ancient home of the tribe; the roaring winds, the cries of the dying, the pleas of Sutui and the flight of the survivors over the great billows, flung to sea in canoes that held practically no provisions.

Then came the drifting and the starving. No sight of land. Men too weak, too hopeless to paddle, women and children living skeletons that gibbered in the bottom of the canoes.

And then a ship. And white men. It must have been one of the earliest of all American whalers to the Antarctic. They took aboard the suffering islanders, cared for them, fed them and sailed with them, out of their own course perhaps, to the island, unnamed then, uncharted still, that the grateful tribesmen called Talofah.

But the heart of the epic was the gratitude of the rescued, their adoration of the white men, the *Merikani*, their wonder of their ways and the mystery of the flag beneath which they sailed.

One likes to think of that old captain, tough old whaler of New England stock, a driver of his own men, bold-spirited and, as was then a usual case, reverent believer in Him Who guarded those who went down to the sea in ships and controlled the great leviathans, a reader of His Book, telling to Tarua the king and Sutui the priest, the meaning of the Stars and Stripes—far fewer stars those days—that flew at his main-gaff.

To Tarua and Sutui it was a fetish, the emblem of those white men, as indeed it should have been. And when the skipper gave them an extra flag their delight knew no bounds. Read what Kalani sang of, in a rich soprano, usurping the place of the soloist after she had taken the flag from the sandalwood chest and draped it about her with its faded blue and red.

"White, white are the stars;
White on the blue;
They are the eyes of the gods
The gods of the *Merikani*,

Ever unwinking and watchful,
Seeing the deeds of men;
Approving the good *Merikani*

"Red, red are the stripes;
Red as the sky at sunset;
Red as the blood of a man.
The blood-red bands of friendship!

"Ever beneath this cloth;
Whether they dwell in peace;
Whether they go to war;
Under the eyes of their gods,
Bound by the blood-red bands;
Freedom and Justice thrive
Dealt by the brave *Merikani*.

"An open hand for the poor;
A listening ear for the slave;
A blow for the wicked man;
Yet mercy for the wrongdoer.

"Wherever these stars shall shine;
Wherever these stripes shall wave;
There the oppressor hides
From the vengeful eyes of the gods,
From the gods of the good *Merikani*;
From the stripes that shall start on his back
And teach him the lesson of wisdom.
So we may live in Talofah!"



KALANI'S voice rang out like the notes of a golden bugle. Thus it ended, with a crash of the drums. It was epic. And it represented the soul of the islanders. No matter what Tarua might have believed or Sutui the priest striven to inculcate, this was the religion of Talofah. These *Merikani*, these white men, had rescued the tribe from a horrible death, had treated them generously and ended their good-will by landing them on a place that must have been more fruitful, far more peaceful, than the island that had gone down in fire and smoke and steam and clouds of pumice ash. Taku's jugglings could not disturb this simple faith and belief in the example of the "good *Merikani*" and their emblematic war-cloth.

It is possible that the old Yankee skipper may have yarned of valiant deeds of the American Navy, so young and sturdy an infant at that time, while they sailed toward this island that he remembered passing, a cloud on the horizon, days before.

Such things would certainly have appealed to Tarua. It would seem that he must have called it a "battle-flag" and so the translation to war-cloth, the word "flag" being untranslatable and the whole talk having been necessarily limited to a hundred or so words of the skipper's South-Sea vocabulary.

But there it was, the Stars and Stripes and what they stood for, enshrined in the hearts of a simple if a savage race, recognizing virtues and applauding them, a seed sown for a great harvest by Abinadab Allen, or whatever the sturdy old salt was called. His name is not preserved in Talofan oral archives.

With the replacing of the flag in the chest and its consignment to her waiting women by Kalani, the ceremony of the day was ended. The guests broke up and visited and Taku watched Kalani slip away along the beach, close followed by Upolu. To interfere upon their privacy would be rank breach of etiquette but the wizard saw a third figure that went stealthily, skulking back of the bushes, gliding between boulders, ears and eyes bent on the lovers. It was Vaega, and Taku, with his dry chuckle, followed more slowly.

Kalani and Upolu strode along with equal ease and Taku, left far behind, hurried over a stretch of sand toward a ridge of brush-grown rock that hid the couple. Before he reached it, conscious of Vaega somewhere at the foot of the cliff, they had turned and were close upon him.

He was no commoner but he thought fit to make excuse.

"I did not see you go this way," he said. "Or I might have known you wished to be alone together."

Kalani arched her eyebrows imperiously. Upolu looked at him steadily. He did not like Taku and his underground methods.

"They say that was a wondrous pearl you gave Kalani," went on Taku. "I did not see it well for I am not as tall as some. Who found it for you, Upolu?"

"Is it your eyes or mine that suffer, Taku?" asked Upolu, his own clouding at Taku's suggestion. "Surely I saw you squatting on the cliff when I dived for the pearl at noon of yesterday?"

"Did you bring up a pearl? I heard that Rumi found one last week that must have nearly matched it. But they say that he has lost it."

He winced as he closed his insinuation. He saw that he had gone too far with his unreined malice.

"I have not heard of Rumi's pearl, Taku," said Upolu. "But I will tell you how I got this one." He laid a compelling hand on Taku's shoulder. "It was deep where the oysters were bedded and I think

the pearl came from the last shell I gathered. It was firmly fixed but I clutched it hard—thus!”

He whirled Taku about and caught him from behind by both elbows, pinioning them to the wizard's side relentlessly.

“And so I lifted it.”

As he spoke, he lifted Taku up from the ground without visible effort, up and over his head until the struggling man was held at arm's length. Then with a laugh he tossed him aside into some bushes where Taku flopped like a great disheveled bird, his robe awry about his face and shoulders.

“Out of my way, little man,” said Upolu. “When a canoe is meant for two, a third person is better absent.”

Taku's evil face glared at them for a moment between the leaves and then they heard him scuttling cliffward.

“It was not wise to do that, Upolu,” said Kalani.

“I am not afraid of him.”

“He will plot to kill you. He may do so.”

“Even then I should not be afraid of him,” said Upolu simply.

“But he would be afraid of me,” said Kalani, her wide eyes viperish, her little, even teeth showing.

“Let us not talk of Taku,” said Upolu; “let us go to the pool.”

A waterfall tumbled merrily from the cliff into a rock basin that was fringed with ferns and with pandanus trees. Flower petals from wandering vines made the air sweet and sent a little fleet of tiny ships asail upon the dimpled water.

There the two seated themselves, confessed lovers now. Almost every Polynesian is a poet; whenever emotion moves them their mind develops the imagery of their surroundings and so supplies a text.

“Without you,” Upolu murmured, “I was a night without stars, a canoe adrift without paddles, a shrub without blossoms, a tree without fruit.”

Kalani, being a woman, liked that sort of thing. She basked in it, purred gentle commendation and encouraged Upolu to further flights while behind the ferns, fomenting her jealousy, treating her love for Upolu as a child bites down upon an aching tooth, Vaega writhed in torment.

Farther away, and higher, Taku watched from a ledge. He was too far off to hear the words of the lovers—as a matter of fact

he was not interested in them—but he caught occasional glances of the face of Vaega and he was in full view of every motion she made. He regarded her as a cruel youngster looks upon the thrashing of a scotched snake and he read her features as one might read an open book.

“Beloved,” said Kalani after a silent while. “It is the bathing hour. I must go to the pool with the maidens or I shall be missed. And our betrothal is not yet known.”

The golden bloom of her face flushed as a peach's golden surface flushes under the ardor of the sun. Even a princess might not break unscathed the customs of the land. Lovers were supposed to suppress their ardors, even their private meeting, until announcement was made with due ceremony of their vows. The law was the brake upon too impetuous amours, ripening over-swiftly amid sunshine and flowers and the atmosphere of tropic redundancy.

She left him, to join the unwedded girls in their pool at the foot of the biggest cataract of the island, a pool forbidden to the eye of man, guarded with trespass-sticks, outposted by the younger girls. There, in the costume of Eve, the virgins of Talofah splashed and swam and slid down the smooth rocks of the cascade, clad only in wreaths, their merry laughter topping the rush of the waters.

 UPOLU, left by the little fountain, mused and day-dreamed and then, the drowse of the siesta hour upon him, dreamed in good earnest. And Taku crept down toward Vaega. She had been weeping passionately; her hair was gritty with the sand that she had clawed in her misery. At the touch of the wizard she showed a swollen, vindictive face. Taku beckoned and, wonderingly obedient, she followed him down the beach to a tiny arbor where vine leaves masked the stilted roots of a pandanus.

Taku spoke craftily, watching the play of Vaega's tell-tale features.

“Fetch me a lock of Upolu's hair while he sleeps,” he whispered in her ear. “Here is my cutting-shell. Only one lock and I will cast a spell upon him that will make him turn to you.”

Vaega looked up at him out of puffed eyelids, red with crying.

“Why Upolu's hair?” she asked. “I can

bring you a combing of Kalani's. Cast the spell upon her. I am no wizard but I am a woman and I can read the heart of a man, even if he be Taku. You love Kalani."

Taku's face was long trained to obedience. It did not flinch at the home-truth. Instead he grinned at Vaega.

"I can not charm Kalani. Did I not give her a talisman against all evil?"

"You sought to protect her against yourself. You must have lost your cunning, O Taku. Yet even that will not count, for did you not see that Kalani has given her charm to Upolu? It lies about his neck."

Taku had not seen that. He hid the involuntary distortion that twitched his lips in a wider grin.

"The charm was made for Kalani. It has no virtue for Upolu. Moreover, Kalani is of the same blood as myself and I have no power over her, we both being heaven-born. But over Upolu, who is not of my blood, I can prevail. What if I love Kalani? You love Upolu. When he shall turn to you, Kalani is left to me. What do you know of magic? A wizard's heart is not as another man's. Get me the lock of hair."

Vaega looked at him long. The tender passages of Kalani and Upolu had tinged her blood with wormwood; it ran bitter with the acid of failing rivalry and she ached for the arms of Upolu.

"Give me the knife," she said.

Taku passed her the implement and slipped away, suppressing his dry chuckle. In his devil-cave he lit a fire into which he cast stones that would retain heat. With these he brought a calabash of water to the boil and cast within it certain herbs that filled the cave with pungent wreaths of vapor. Among them he squatted, one eye on the poison-fish, now swollen to shapelessness.



T IRED of swimming but, paradoxically, refreshed by it, Kalani, tying her hair, discovered she had lost a turtle-shell comb from her coiffure, and sent a willing girl to look for it, surmising that Upolu's caresses might have loosened it. Proud to be despatched by the princess, the long-legged youngster made swift and silent speed toward the spot to which she was directed and, breaking through a screen of low-growing palmetto, saw Vaega, prone, her arms stretched out toward the slumbering chief.

With the slyness of the half-girl, half-woman, the youngster crept to a better vantage point and watched Vaega as she carefully, deftly, lifted a lock of Upolu's hair, pressed it about her knuckles and severed it with the sharp-lipped shell-knife of Taku.

There was no doubt in the maid's mind as to the purpose of the deed. At twilight, about the fires, tales of magic were frequent and always the victim was bewitched through the securing of his spittle or his hair, or the paring of a nail. Did she not with care dry up her own saliva ejections in the sand and burn her hair combings and cuttings in secret, as she did the clippings of her nails? Vaega was a witch! Wide-eyed, she crept back into cover and then raced across the sands to the princess.

"Vaega! She has taken hair from the head of Upolu!"

Kalani, no longer the musing mistress, stood erect, coiling the dusky streamers of her hair with swift gestures. Still unclothed, she seemed a tropical Diana. Wrath and understanding blazed in her eyes as she swiftly bound her loin-skirt and outer garment about her and ordered the girl to come with her, setting a pace that left the younger panting far behind, lashed by the imperious words of the princess to prodigious efforts.

The footprints of Vaega were an open page to Kalani and she traced them with ease to the trespass-sticks that still guarded Taku's devil-cave. There they stopped and went away again at a tangent. Vaega had not dared to pass the tabu. Between the wands she had handed over the lock of Upolu. Then she had fled.

Out of the cave came aromatic wisps of vapor. The girl stood with her eyes apop as Kalani strode between the wands that held no terror for her royalty and entered the dark hollow. Then the maid crouched down between the rocks, tugged at by terror but anchored yet more firmly by a morbid curiosity.

CHAPTER V

THE AMAZON

TAKU, engrossed in his incantation, neither saw the approach of Kalani nor heard it over the sand. For once his peephole did not serve him nor the pool bubble for the visitor. The liquid in the calabash

had become a sort of scummy broth. Occasionally he slipped into the mixture a hissing stone. He was seated on the skull of the whale and he had ringed himself about with a circle of skulls, minus their lower jaws, linked with thigh-bones.

His body was smeared in fantastic patterns with earth ochers and wearing his wizard trappings. Human teeth and strung knuckle-bones were about his neck and he wore a sort of sporran made up of the gray beards of ancients. As Kalani entered he was busy chopping the lock of Upolu's hair in a shallow tray. He weaved back and forth as he worked, squatting on his haunches, mumbling over the words and meaningless syllables of a charm handed down from generation to generation.

He did all this automatically. The fact that the princess had given his gift, his amulet against all evil, to her lover, as a pledge of affection, as a desire to shield him rather than herself, transcended all other thoughts for the time. It acted as fuel to the flames of his distorted passion and, when he glanced up and saw her superb beauty, something snapped in his brain. He rose to his feet and grinned at her diabolically, lifting the tray and tilting it so that the minced hair of Upolu would fall into the bubbling calabash.

Kalani struck the bottom of the tray and sent it flying.

"Harm but one fleck of the body of my beloved," she cried; "shorten his life but by one pulse-beat and I, Kalani, will have your bones broken and you bound to a stake in the reef-gate, for the sharks to feed upon!"

The wizard, spellbound himself by the fury of the Amazon, resorted to the cunning of his tongue. He had been caught in the act; he knew that Vaega must have been overseen and followed.

"I mean Upolu no harm," he lied. "Is it a fault that I am stricken with your beauty, Kalani, and that I desire to possess it?" His eyes, red-lidded by the smoke, wandered over the virginal beauty of her figure and were glazed with crimson. "Nay, listen to me. What I do is for Vaega and for myself. She loves Upolu as I love you, Kalani. There is no crime in that. Upolu is not a fitting mate for you. With what stirs here—" he struck his forehead—"you and I can make Talofah the center of a nation not to remain unknown. We will send out

fleets with soothsayers and with warriors to conquer by peace or battle and we will found a kingdom over which our children and their children's children shall rule."

Kalani looked at him with a supreme contempt that reached to his very marrow. The crimson gaze deepened in his eyes that still were hypnotized by her charms.

"If I should ever be so cursed as to bear child of thine," she said slowly, "I would strangle the monster before its lips touched my breast. You lie! It is no charm you make. I saw the poison-fish at the mouth of the cave as I entered. And the thorns beside it. The sharks shall not feed on you, O Taku! We will find a longer death for you and a more shameful one. It shall be a celebration among the people."

"They dare not touch me," answered Taku. "I am heaven-born and tabu."

"Not tabu to me. If harm comes to Upolu, I will kill you with my own hands. Cripple!"

It was the consummate insult. The smoldering crimson in the wizards's eyes glowed and flamed.

"Cripple? And you will kill me?"

He crouched a little, his hands opening and shutting, a bestial thing with glowing eyes, beset in its lair.

He leaped for her across the fire, intent upon her humiliation. What might follow he cared not. A vague idea backed his purpose that if he became her master for very shame she must take him as husband. But there was little reason behind his spring.

Kalani caught his right elbow with her left hand and cupped it, crushing his lower knuckles in the slender but powerful fingers of her right hand. Taku shrugged with the pain but countered with a vicious side chop of his left palm at her neck.

But Kalani was an adept in the Amazonian games of the girls of Talofah. She used the fury of Taku to her own advantage, stepping back as she applied the torture to his arm, twisting it until he was bent almost double with the agony and the threat of broken bones.

With a deft kick she struck the back of Taku's knees and he went down, with Kalani atop. In vain he tried to pitch her off. She was astride his chest, too far forward for the onslaught of his uptossing legs. Her own knees pinned flat the biceps of his arms and her fingers sought the nerves beneath his armpits. He shrieked as she found

them and bruised their tender surfaces.

His arms were paralyzed, his tongue protruded from his dry lips, flecked with foam and blood where he had bitten them in the exquisite pain. Kalani's thumbs sought and discovered the swelling pulses of his jugular and stopped the flow of blood until his jaw slackened, his eyes looked like those of a dead fish and his brain was numb.

Then she picked up the slack body almost as easily as Upolu had done, slung it across her shoulders and stepped outside the cave.

The little maid saw her mistress sling the wizard into his own magic pool with a resounding splash and, as the shock of the water somewhat restored his consciousness, pick up the slab on which was the poison-fish and hurl that bloated venom at Taku, who was, fortunately for his own safety, just then sinking again amid bubbles of his own blowing.

The distended body of the fish burst with the impact and bits of oily foulness drifted over the disturbed water of the little pond. The agonized face of Taku showed above the surface as he clubbed his way to shore and, yet too weak to stand erect, scrambled out on all fours and scuttled to his cave, like a hermit-crab naked from an old shell and seeking immediate cover.

Hands and knees struck the thorns intended for Upolu and the wizard squeaked with the pain, hardly realizing that the barbs were still innocuous. He clutched at his robe as he crawled over his threshold and started to swab off any fragments of the poison-fish, glaring out to where Kalani had vanished.

The shrill "tec-hee" of a child's laughter mocked him and he withdrew into the recesses of the cave, broken, knowing that some one had spied upon his undoing and that all Talofah would rock with suppressed laughter round the fires that night.

As for Kalani, still glowing with her triumph, she strode back toward her palace. The next thing to do was to pronounce the betrothal of Upolu and herself and appoint the day for the betrothal feast. That would curb any machinations of Taku for, though he was humiliated, she was too wise to undervalue him.

She met Upolu as she emerged from the palace, once more robed and with her hair combed and set with flowers. He was coming up from the men's swimming, looking, she thought, and not unjustly, like a young god.

She did not tell him of her encounter with Taku. There were things connected with the wizard's onslaught that she was shy of revealing to her lover.

"I am going to set free the birds they brought me," she said. "I would not keep them from their nests tonight. And then I will show you my pearls—our pearls, Upolu."

CHAPTER VI

ADRIFT

THE whale-boat from Temeteri floated under a sky that was blue yet glazed with a metallic luster, sending down the heat of a brazen furnace. The dark-blue sea seemed to reflect this heat from its ever-changing facets. A storm had passed and sapped the little strength that was left in the ten men, desiccated by the scorching sunshine that had dried crystals of salt upon their clothes, their faces and their beards.

Their eyes were deep sunken and lusterless, their lips blackened, swollen, cracked with bloody blisters, and their hands were puffed till they looked like so many starfish. The palms showed open sores. There was no food left in the boat, scantily provisioned from the first; no water fit to drink, though the sea itself swashed mid-knee high, seeping through the uncalked seams, despite all bailing.

Seven days had done this. One man lolloped on the bottom boards, his limp body awash, his drawn, blackened face supported on a thwart, lolling to the motion of the ground swell. Another was humped in the bows, half mad, croaking the words of some long-forgotten ballad of his youth—

"Ich liebe dich, ich liebe dich, mein —"

Somebody swore at him feebly but he rasped on.

Weissman sat in the stern by the idle steering-oar. Their jury-sail had been lost in the storm and the men had ceased to row from weakness. They had no compass. Weissman, with all his charts, none too good despite German efficiency, had lost all sense of drift or dead reckoning in the gale.

He knew he was drifting east and south on some faint current but the knowledge bore little comfort. It mattered little at what point of the compass they might find their end. Not that he was ready to give up. Every movement was an effort that

left him appreciably weaker but there was yet some will to drive within him.

Since the storm, as if conjured up for an impending feast, a school of sharks had appeared and escorted the boat, growing ever bolder, coming ever near until they nuzzled the craft from time to time with their gray snouts, rocking it, sliding along its strakes with their raspy hides, patient, inexorable, their yellow eyes fixed as their purpose.

All the arms in the boat were piled up beside Weissman. He had fired at the sharks, for a while, killed or badly wounded one of them, but the rest had promptly given their fellow a living burial and caught up again with the floating casket that they considered their larder. He had given up shooting at them. It wasted ammunition, there were too many, and too hard to hit, and the rifle had grown strangely heavy in the last twelve hours.

Two men were taking their turn at bailing the boat. The rest sprawled inert on the seats. The bails were coconut shells and they had to be worked almost incessantly to produce any effect. There was a sensible depression in the atmosphere and Weissman felt it. A slight rise of wind and wave and the sharks would have their fill. His weary eyes scanned the horizon and then returned to the boat. One of the men had dropped his coconut shell and made no effort to recover it.

"Guttman! Guttman!"

The man lifted a heavy head in which two bleary eyes sparked feebly.

"Pick up that bailer. Go to work!"

The effort of barking out the command brought the blood spurting from Weissman's lips and he licked them with difficulty. Guttman, his arms drooping, made no response to the order. Weissman lifted his automatic.

"I'm going to count three, Guttman! Pick up your bailer!"

There was a faint stir of interest in the crew, all save the man asleep in the bottom and the madman in the bows. Guttman essayed two gutturals, bred of despair and the fact that his arms were leaden. They would not lift to any effort of his will and that was in mutiny.

The pistol cracked. A blue star appeared in Guttman's forehead. The dying body remained as it was until a blob of blood appeared, issuing from the wound, and then he choked suddenly and slumped to one

side. The soggy boat veered with him. The sound of the shot seemed to galvanize the crew to a semblance of life.

Guttman now trailed against the gunwale, one hand in the sea. There was a swirl, the showing of the dorsal of a shark, a snatch, a heavy tremor throughout the boat and Guttman's body was dragged overboard, for a moment the center of a beneath-the-surface disturbance that sent long ripples, smeared with blood, circling over the waves.

A shudder and a sigh were shared by all the half-dozen that, outside of Weissman, retained some normality. The other bailer had dropped his coconut and Weissman faced him, his pistol menacing, if tremulous.

"You, you hound! Bail! Schwartz, pick up Guttman's shell!"

For a moment both men hesitated, the shock wearing off from their seared mentalities swiftly, their eyes dull, half comprehending the command. The heavy pistol wavered in Weissman's hand while he strove to keep it steady with an effort of his brain that seemed expanding under the frightful heat.

Suddenly a light leaped into his eyes. He put down the pistol and pointed far ahead.

"Bail, swineheads, bail!" he shouted with a ghost of his old authority. "Land! Land ahead! Out oars. Bail and pull! God of the heavens, we are saved!"

The men turned their laggard heads on their aching necks. Ahead, far ahead but indisputable, appeared a blue cone, tremulous but constant. It was the top of a mountain, the highest spires of Talofah.

Weissman consulted his charts. There was no land marked anywhere that in reason he might suppose himself to be. But the cone was unmistakable. Already it was less tremulous and assuming definite outline. He shook his puffed fist at the sharks, black blood oozing from his knuckles.

"We've beaten you, you sea-wolves," he shouted, half delirious in his revulsion. "Beaten you, — you! Pull, men, pull!"

With two throwing out a constant stream of water and four tugging at the oars, the whale-boat made progress and at noon Weissman could distinguish streaks of green below the cone. Talofah swam like an opal in gleams of violet and emerald.

By mid afternoon the rowers were utterly exhausted. The oars fell from their swollen hands. Weissman himself was at

the end of his powers. A current caught them in its swirl and swept the boat in a wide arc that threatened to carry them well outside the southern horn of the lee crescent, now apparent. The sharks were still with them.

Close to twilight Weissman caught the faint sound of surf that raised him from his apathy. The boat was filling again. He could not force the men to bail. He had himself lost all power of movement.

The last glare of the westerling sun, level with the sea, showed the boat as a thing that held no life. The nine men, scarcely to be styled survivors, were huddled together in the bottom a league from shore, slowly being carried by the current past the island to a watery desert.

A man came racing down the mountain just as the evening fires were being lit on Talofah.

"I have seen a canoe," he cried. "Not like ours. The canoe, I think, of white men. But they are not paddling. I think they are cast away."

"As Tarua the king!" cried Kalani with swift imagination. "Upolu, they are white men; they may be *Merikanil* Go!"

A few minutes later four canoes surged out, racing to the rescue. Weissman and his men were taken tenderly aboard, the whale-boat hitched in tow to one canoe and, as the sky turned from pink to olive, Upolu led them through the reef gate and shouted to Kalani that "all was well."

CHAPTER VII

THE AUDIENCE

WITH the courtesy of perfect hospitality Kalani gave orders that the strangers should be left alone, save for the providing of all comforts, until they had recovered from their cruel voyage. Her instinct told her that these white men, being superior beings and therefore proud, would prefer not to come to an audience until they were feeling fit to represent themselves with all dignity.

It was no easy matter for Kalani to overcome her own curiosity as to the newcomers. About them she flung a vigorous tabu, fencing off the little cove in which they were established with trespass-sticks, through which only those who waited upon the strangers might pass.

Being a woman, she was eaten up with the desire to know all about them. Meanwhile she strove to repay to them something of the generosity shown to Tarua the king and Sutui the priest by the white men who had brought the tribe to Talofah.

Weissman and his men lived royally on fruits and flesh of pigs and goats, on fish and turtles, on pigeons and the cool, bubbly juice of young coconuts. Every dawn a profusion of these things was set inside their fence of trespass-sticks and at intervals messengers were sent to them to ask about their special needs. Mats and lengths of paper-cloth, garlands of flowers, everything that Kalani could think of, were given freely. And the scars of the voyage were soon healed.

For days Taku had kept himself to his wizard quarters, conscious of the titterings that followed him when he appeared in-public. The little maid had babbled and all Talofah had reveled in the picture of Kalani hurling Taku into his own magic pool.

If Taku could have found out what girl had talked it would have gone hard with her, but his dignity would not permit him to discuss the matter. Ridicule meant loss of prestige, and he shrewdly argued that the sooner the affair died down the better. He hailed the advent of the strangers with delight, knowing that his own troubles would be lost in the new excitement.

As for Vaega, she lived in constant fear of Kalani's vengeance. The princess had ignored her part in the attempt upon Upolu's life, save for one glance from her eyes that told Vaega she was neither forgiven nor forgotten. She too was glad of the coming of the white men.

Weissman was content to bask in the sun, to bathe in the lagoon or under the natural shower of a cliff cascade, to eat and sleep and get back his strength and that of his men. But he held strict discipline. He made them keep the camp clean and patch and make over their clothes against the coming audience with the chiefs of this little island kingdom. Nor did he neglect the overhauling of the whale-boat nor the oiling up of the little armory.

His next move he put off until he had seen what manner of an island this was that the current had borne them to. The folk were kindly; they might be made useful. The place was uncharted, so for the time they

were safe. They might stay here for years and not be discovered.

But Weissman was not the type to lie up in a pleasant haven. His underlings might be satisfied to lead this lotus-eating life, to take as mates the soft-eyed, golden-skinned girls, but he would have none of it and told them so.

Weissman by breed and education was a driver and to one purpose he was sworn by every instinct—hatred against all those who had thwarted the will of the All-Highest. When he thought of the spoliation of the plantation at Temeteri he scourged his soul to further lengths of rage and hopes of revenge.

The language of Talofah was not very far remote from such dialects as Weissman already knew. There were a few consonantal changes to be mastered, a few idioms, and he would be able to converse readily. To that end he talked with the messengers sent by Kalani, but they were timid and he was forced to content himself by announcing that he and his men were now restored to health through the bounty of Kalani, and waited eagerly the opportunity of rendering thanks.

Seven days of luxurious idleness had commenced to affect his men with ennui. They sprawled on the sands and began to wish for more than the fleshpots that had been given them.

Brandt tossed away contemptuously the half-emptied chalice of a young coconut and yawned.

"That stuff makes me sick at the stomach," he complained. "Why don't they bring us *kawa*?"

"Or send us half a dozen girls to make it for us."

"Ah, maidens! Golden maidens of the sun," drawled Schoenwald. Brandt laughed coarsely.

"I warrant they would be willing enough to come. I have seen eyes peeping out of the pandanus often enough."

"They are afraid of the tabu-sticks."

"Well, we are not. Let's go on a hunt for them!"

Amid a universal guffaw half a dozen of the men were on their feet, only to find Weissman facing them with his ready automatic.

"The first man through those sticks gets shot," he barked.

"We want to use these people, not abuse

them. We have got to get information from them, to get some idea of where we are in these forbidden seas. We'll get friendly with them, make them help us to build a ship. Then if you like you can take your women aboard for playthings. Until then you'll curb yourselves."

"And what will we do with the ship?" sneered Schoenwald although his fellows, still shackled from the long habit of obedience to their superiors, showed signs of appreciating Weissman's argument.

"Sail it, you fool. To the west, to German Africa; or to the east, to South America; winning our way back to the homeland."

"And get blown out of the water before we've sailed a hundred leagues! Why go back to the homeland when we've all we need here?"

Weissman's face got purple and he strode up close to Schoenwald, his face thrust close to his subordinate's, speaking in a hissing tone that was almost a whisper but surcharged with determination.

"Listen, you traitorous swine!" he said. "The next word from you that smacks of mutiny and I blow out your brains, little quality though they are to waste the cartridge. A ship we build, a ship we sail. If it is only a small one we'll capture a bigger. It has been done before but not by men who let women use them for toys."

Schoenwald tried to outlook the blazing eyes of Weissman but failed and turned away with a shrug. Weissman put back his pistol in its holster, content to press the matter no further. He was still the leader. The others grinned covertly at Schoenwald. The man called Brandt spoke.

"Here comes one of the big toads in this puddle," he announced.



IT WAS Upolu, splendid in the symmetry of his perfect body and his chief's carriage, overtopping the strangers with their sluggish bodies and their bullet heads, yet regarding them with open admiration and deference as became superior beings.

"Kalani the princess sends greetings and bids you to a festival," he said. "It will be in the cool of the afternoon as soon as the sun drops behind the peak."

Weissman answered in the nearest dialect, spoiling the liquid syllables with his guttural tones.

"Will there be *kawa*?" asked Brandt,

regardless of Weissman's frown. "Strong drink is for men and coco-milk for children."

"What Talofah has is yours," replied Upolu. "Surely there will be the cup of ceremony and friendship. Greeting and love to you."

He left them, walking away with graceful dignity. Brandt stuck his tongue in his cheek with a side glance at Weissman and muttered to his nearest comrade.

"*Kawa*—and maybe maidens after all, friend Schwartz?"

Schwartz winked, his eyes bloodshot.

In the early twilight the pits were opened and the feast set, the strangers garlanded and waited upon by girls who wondered secretly at the gluttony of their guests, who gorged themselves and drank the brew of the wild-ginger root until their veins were distended and they fidgeted in their seats, casting lecherous glances at their servers, slyly attempting familiarities.

Weissman himself was getting a little out of hand as he licked his lips under the cover of his beard and furtively watched every movement of Kalani. Inflamed by the liquor and their own grossness, the beasts in them were chafing at the collars of restraint.

Clear water in bowls of polished hardwood was brought to cleanse the fingers from the feast. The beach in front of the mats was cleared and the master of the dance marshaled his performers and musicians. The whites leaned back at ease against the boles of trees and the posts of the palace, preparing to watch a dance that would appeal to their sensuousness.

Kalani left the side of Weissman. Her faith in the white visitors was still strong though she felt a sense of unease, of disappointment. But the honors must be done. Were not these such men as had rescued Tarua and Sutui, to whom the tribe owed their very existence?

The rhythm of the drums commenced, the dancers arranged their rows, the flutes and Pan-pipes accentuated a minor melody and the soloist commented his chant.

"This is a song of Talofah,
Talofah the island of love;
That is set in the midst of the seas
As a pearl that lies in a pool.
Oh, Talofah the pearl!"

With Weissman, all of the guests had enough smattering of kindred dialects to catch the sense of the words and they

listened condescendingly, sipping at the bowls of *kawa*, watching with sensuous pleasure the sinuous movements of the dancers, moving as one above the waist, the afterglow radiant on the supple arms, the firm breasts. This was as it should be. Wine, women and song! Life was going very well. They were heavy with food, half drunk with the heady *kawa*, all animal.

Then came the mention of the ship and at last Kalani glided out, wrapped in the Stars and Stripes, ready to sing the song of praise to the good *Merikani*.

There was a volley of oaths and the complacent faces of Weissman and his men grew black and scowling as they scrambled to their feet. Kalani recoiled, wondering how she had so palpably offended these men whom she had complimented with the sacred saga of Talofah. Upolu, sensing trouble, came swiftly to her side. Weissman, pistol in hand, strode over the mats, scattering the remnants of the feast, and confronted them.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

Schwartz, with Schoenwald, Brandt and the rest, drew the pistols they had carried even to the peaceful feast and rudely shoved aside the crowding, bewildered islanders. The music had stopped; the rows of dancers were in confusion.

"Are you not *Merikani*?" asked Kalani. "Is not this your flag?"

"Our flag?" roared Weissman, all diplomacy and policy forgotten. "That filthy cloth!"

He spat fairly on its folds where it draped Kalani's bosom, seized a loose end and dragged it from her, whirling her about as it came free. She staggered to one side and Weissman flung the flag upon the ground and started to trample on it.

The Talofans were unarmed. There had seldom been cause to use weapons of offense in the peaceful, remote kingdom. What spears and clubs there were, outside of the implements of the chase, were lodged on the roof-rafters of their houses. But Upolu leaped, his mellow voice changed to the roar of a charging bull. One mighty buffet and Weissman went staggering back, dazed as if struck with a club.

Upolu stooped and retrieved the insulted banner, handing it swiftly to Kalani. The women shrank back in dismay; the children ran shrieking and the islanders stood irresolute, aghast at the ending to the feast.

For the first time on Talofah a gun cracked. From the black, gleaming thing in the hand of Schoenwald spat a flare of exploding powder gas, the bullet striking Upolu in the left shoulder, shattering the collar-bone, boring through and leaving in its wake the gaping mouth of a ragged wound from which the blood poured down the chieftain's back.

Upolu felt the shock, knew his left arm powerless and banded at his aggressor. Weissman fired again and hit him in the head. He failed to gage the speed of the chief's movement or the bullet would have pierced Upolu's brain. As it was it tore a ragged crease across his forehead, the swiftly spurting blood running into Upolu's eyes.

It did not check him. Schoenwald, reliant in his weapon, stood his ground and pulled trigger. Quick as he was Upolu was faster. His rush disconcerted Schoenwald's aim. The pistol muzzled Upolu's lower ribs as it was discharged, burning the naked flesh, the lead smashing a bone, glancing and ranging around the body close to the flesh.

Upolu's blow descended fairly on the side of Schoenwald's jaw where the thick neck joined it, delivered with all the chieftain's strength, backed with his rage. Schoenwald dropped heavily, collapsing at the knees, his gun flying from his hand, and lay very still.

Upolu retrieved the gun and stood at bay, ignorant of how to use the weapon save in one way. He hurled it full at the face of Weissman and the leader went down as if pole-axed.

This was all that saved the hour for Talofah. The pistols were barking in deadly earnest and islander after islander fell prone, gasping out their lives as they stained the beach with their blood, powerless against the magic of the strangers.

Upolu's life fluid was draining fast but, save for the useless arm, he seemed unconscious of it. As Weissman dropped, his face a mask of blood, his nose smashed, his teeth broken and his eyes closing, Upolu looked around for Kalani.

She was hard beside him, the holy war-cloth tight clasped to her, her bosom heaving, her eyes fire, astounded but unafraid. There was a temporary confusion as the Germans hurried to the aid of Weissman and Schoenwald and the firing stopped.

"To the mountain," shouted Upolu. Scarlet-streaked with his own blood, he watched to see his order obeyed. Kalani

seconded it. Upolu staggered and she flung an arm about him. The blood dyed a white stripe to crimson. The blood-red bands of friendship were being joined by bloody bands of hate.

But the islanders moved with an almost incredible swiftness. Before Weissman, sputtering, swearing, could be lifted to his feet, the beach was vacant of Talofans. Only the faintly moving leaves of the bush marked where the jungle had covered them.

Weissman, choking from his broken nose and lacerated jaw, spat out a mouthful of gore. He was beside himself with fury.

"Get back to camp!" he spluttered. "Get the rifles! We'll teach these devils a lesson! Pick up Schoenwald if he can't walk. Hurry! They'll be back with spears."

"He can't walk," said Brandt. "He won't walk any more."

Two thin streams of blood had come from the corners of Schoenwald's mouth, matting his blond beard. His head was on Brandt's knees, hanging queerly.

"The —— Kanaka broke his neck!" said Schwartz.

"Then leave him where he is," said Weissman with an oath. "Get back to the camp!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE RACE ON THE SAND

TAKU the wizard was not present at the audience. He ran no chances of being made ridiculous in the eyes of the visitors by references to the affair between him and the princess. His conceit was at once his strength and his weakness. He walked in it as a deep-sea diver walks in his armor. With it intact he could walk in the depths where others could not follow. Once punctured, he was helpless.

To Taku, his prestige was as the breath of life. To see the little children and the maidens shudder and look askance when he went abroad clad in his garments of mummery, that was power. But to have them titter, was agony. And so small yet so great a thing is the giggle of the young and foolish, he knew that he must use some strong measure for his restoration.

He had the brains of the island, he knew that; he believed in his own powers, in his inherited alliance with the supernatural.

He had aimed for supremacy; he still aimed for it.

He had lost Kalani, he felt certain of that; as certain as he was that no charm he could conjure would affect her. They were too near equals for that by virtue of their heaven-born lineage. Taku realized that the successful conjuror must have a mental ascendancy over his victims and Kalani had shown him that in will and body she was a match for him.

So Taku found himself in the swirl of a trine of emotions, ambition, jealousy, revenge. Vaguely he had hoped for the arrival of the white men as a diversion that would turn the public eye and tongue from Taku and his late misfortunes. He had sulked in his devil-cave when the preparations for the feast were forward, but it is a prime necessity of savage priesthood to know all that is going on.

His latest vassal, Vaega, was out of favor and inclined to flout the prestige of Taku. Had he not brought about her disgrace, his own ridicule, all apparently without any result, save the announcement of the betrothal of Kalani and Upolu? So, setting Vaega aside, Taku crawled through the bush and peeped at the proceedings.

He avoided the headlong flight and went back to his cave again. It was in a secluded spot; it had its peep-hole and two private exits that connected with blow-out fissures in the lava backing. It was the safest spot for him at present, he concluded; and as the dusk sifted down Taku took counsel with himself and came to some sound reasonings.

These white men, who were not *Merikani*, who apparently hated that race and its war-cloth, were few in number but powerful. True, Upolu had killed one of them and injured another; but there were at least ten dead islanders upon the beach; and the magic of the weapons carried by the strangers, spitting fiery death, was big magic.

As long as they stayed on the island of Talofah, he, Taku, would be a very, very small coconut.

But, if he could make friends with them, if he could use them and their magic, could get them to leave Talofah with Taku once more supreme? To do that he must first show himself useful to them. How?

And were the eight of them, plus their

fire-spitters, a party more powerful than the islanders. Upolu was out of it, dead perhaps. He, Taku, could depend upon a certain following, bigger now since Upolu's downfall.

Kalani was somewhat of an unknown factor. She had wit and the warrior spirit.

Establishing these premises, Taku, surrounded by his grim paraphernalia, sat in the mouth of his cave, chewing the cud of chance.

Weissman, back in the cove with his men, reconsidered his first maddened impulse to kill. Darkness was only a short while off, the Talofans were hidden in the bush and his training imperatively suggested that he look to his own defenses. The incident of that hated flag had upset his plans for using the islanders amicably. He must still use them if he carried out his idea of building a ship.

There were some four hundred warriors on Talofah, he had estimated. It was not going to be an easy matter to subjugate them. While his party had a fair supply of ammunition, that must not be thrown away. After they had left Talofah they might have dire need of every cartridge. Fighting in their own surroundings, the islanders would be likely to give a good account of themselves. Fifty to one was mighty odds even against rifles and automatic pistols; and Weissman did not know that the Talofans were short of weapons.

It behooved him to guard against surprise, and he set his men to work making the cove a fortress. That the islanders would seek revenge he did not doubt. They were of Polynesian type, friendly toward strangers but terrible fighting men when aroused, as the broken neck of Schoenwald attested, and his own broken countenance.

He did not think they used blow-guns and poisoned darts like the head-hunters of Temeteri. The races were different, and Weissman had a fair idea of the varying customs. But they must be kept at firearm distance.

Weissman was thankful for the moonlight nights ahead. With camp constructed in the natural rock barricades of the cove and with sentinels set, they could guard against surprise and stand a fair chance of frustrating a mass attack, the thing most to be feared. There was the cascade for

water, the sea for fish, a fair amount of nuts and fruit within gathering that did not call for too much risk. They had already taught the natives a sharp lesson but the situation was not entirely a happy one.

He cursed the episode of the flag and he cursed his stiffening features and the throb of his head. Especially he cursed Upolu and hoped that he was dying in torment. But after his kind he rose to the occasion and he drove his men. Thanks to the lavish hospitality of Kalani they had food for two or three days on supply, and he established rations and set sentinels and announced the few drastic regulations of the little camp.

"After moonrise, if everything is quiet," he announced, "we must get rid of those bodies. They are too close. We'll pack them in a canoe and let the ebb carry them through the reef-gate. Then the sharks will play undertaker. Schoenwald we'll bury. We are in a tight corner and we've got to get out of it. Leave that to me. And don't forget that I am issuing the orders. No move must be made without my authority."

In the half-light, with his swollen face, black with bruises and purple-smeared with blood, his rough voice rasping through broken teeth and thickened lips, his eyes glaring and bloodshot behind puffed lids, he was such a picture of incarnate fury that the rest accepted his dominance in silence, subdued by his superior frightfulness. Generations of obedience to authority backed the commands of Ober-Leutnant Weissman. They recognized that he was the Moses to lead them out of this present wilderness.



AS FOR Kalani, with her lover wounded, weak from loss of blood, ten others lying smitten on the sands by the fire-spit of the strangers, her ideals of these white men smashed, for she had thought them all kin to the *Merikani* of the Stars and Stripes, everything merged in a royal rage at this climax to her hospitality. Upolu had collapsed from sheer lack of blood before they had climbed half a mile of trail and she had organized litter-bearers and led the retreat to the Pool of Manoa, posting sentries on the trails with such poor substitutes for weapons as they could immediately muster.

Two great ridges spoke out from the central peak of Talofah. They were clad with thick verdure from near the fin-like naked crests to their three valley slopes. Near to where they converged, a cross-ridge, part of the wall of an ancient crater, joined the ridges and formed a great A with the bar high in the angle. At the foot of this cross-ridge lay the pool of Manoa fed by springs that seeped from underground sources, fed also from the watershed of the main ridges. Behind the cross-bar was the pit of the old crater, arid and desolate.

But Manoa was sheltered and fertile, the Winter home of the tribe. The terms Winter and Summer are really paradoxical, though they translate in those terms. Winter is the rainy season, in our Summer, when the tropical, torrential rains spill down unceasingly until all the land is astream and sodden. Summer is our Winter, balmy, beautiful, when the islanders desert the mountains for the sea. Now her Summer palace was practically in the hands of these men who ate grossly, as they acted, and who had spat upon the sacred flag draped about her own royal person.

Weapons of sorts there were at Manoa, clubs and quarter-staves and spears tipped with bone or saw-edged with shark-teeth. Not enough to arm a quarter of the warriors, insufficient against the spit-fire magic of the usurping whites. These must be driven from Talofah. Kalani had no second thought as to that issue. And her blood ran savage and riotous.

Once in her hands she would wreak upon them all the finesse of cruelty. They had not only desecrated the *Merikani* cloth, emblem of friendship and peace, her own person, but they had sorely wounded Upolu. She gloried in the buffet of her lover that had killed one of these invaders; in the blow that had broken the face of their leader; and she ached to finish the work. Yet in her heart she feared the strange weapons, not knowing the limit of their powers.

She looked for Taku that she might command his wisdom of healing for Upolu, and, missing him, condemned him as a coward. With her own hands she stanching the welling of Upolu's wounds and bound about them poultices of soothing leaves. Then, when he had fallen into fitful slumber at last, and the moon sailed up in the east, she started on an expedition to spy out the

enemy's camp and to visit her own dead.

Half a score of them were lying on the beach. She did not know what indignities these cruel white men might practise on their bodies. They were her people, stricken down at a feast, given to their murderers. But she did not want to risk more lives. Tomorrow she would devise some plan to sweep these brutal strangers from Talofah, or, better, capture them and teach them that the rites of hospitality, the sacred tenets of Talofah, were not to be overridden.

She wanted also to get the pearls left behind in the flight. Especially the pearl that Upolu had given her, her love gift. Secure in her bush-wisdom, she prepared to descend to the beach. She might bring back some weapons as well as the pearls; she could find out how the foe was established and plan some definite offensive.

Avoiding even her own sentries, she glided down the bush trail swiftly, clad only in a short kilt. Occasionally the moon-beams stole through the heavy foliage and kissed the perfect symmetry of her body as she stole along, a Diana of the South Seas, unarmed.

She broke noiselessly through the thicket back of her Summer palace, passed through the breadfruit grove and stood on its verge listening, blent with the shadows. Reassured, she passed into the house and found the pearls safe in the chest. These she placed in a bag of paper-cloth that had been waterproofed with coconut-oil and tied the mouth with a strand of sennit.

This she suspended about her neck and, stepping silently as a doe, came between the kingposts and looked out upon the ravished feast and the crescent beach, silver under the lifting moon, dotted with the inanimate forms of her dead people. The place was undisturbed. To her right, among the pandanus, lay the corpse of Schoenwald.

From the cove where the strangers were quartered came the sound of singing, the harsh tones of their foreign language piercing the night as they chanted about their fires.

What manner of men were these, she wondered, who would leave their dead unburied?

Suddenly she caught her breath. One of the still figures had moved. A hand was upflung from an elbow and then flexed

again. She thought she heard a moan. The man was still alive.

She caught up a cup of coco-shell and filled it at the living pool behind the palace, then hastened to the sufferer. The face was upturned, the eyes gleaming; but the lips moved in a mutter for mercy. The islander had been shot through the lungs and death was very near.

Kalani knelt and cradled his head on the soft crook of her young arm, setting the water to the fevered, irresponsible mouth, trying to get a few drops through the clenched teeth.

For a moment the man's eyes rolled back to normal, gazing wonderingly at his royal mistress. His mouth opened but it was with the relaxation of muscles no longer acting to the will. Still the jaws seemed to mouth the first syllable of her name.

"Ka——"

No noise, but instinct, made her look up and bound to her feet. A man had come out of the pandanus and was facing her, his eyes glittering in the moon as they gloated over her form. It was Weissman. With two of his men he had come to dispose of the dead. The others, at his gesture, were already sidling through the shadows by the palace to cut off Kalani. Erect, proud, disdainful, she faced him, conscious of the leering admiration of his glance, yet superbly unafraid.

Weissman, licking his lacerated lips, his hand stealing toward his automatic, watchful for those who might have come with her, gave her the island greeting, the universal word of love and friendship. And the syllables dribbled on his mouth at the dark lightning that shot from her eyes.

"What kind of man are you who speak of love and friendship to me in the presence of my people who lie dead by your treachery?" she asked. "What kind of man are you, who, plucked from the sea by us, comes to a feast and spits upon those who feed him and make him welcome? We have a word for such men. This is it — swine!"

There was no subtlety in Kalani's choice of epithet. It was the common island phrase for men who had slipped their humanity and no word could have stung Weissman more deeply.

"Schwein?" he muttered. "So!"

He reached out for her but she leaped back over the dead body and as he

advanced caught his right wrist with both her hands and gave his arm such a tendon-twisting wrench that he squealed with the pain.

"Stein!" he called. "Pfeiffer! After her! Don't shoot. It is the princess!"

As he leaped forward clumsily, nursing his arm, the two men closed in, one lunging from the side, the other with better instinct racing at a tangent to cut her off as she wheeled and flew toward the horn of the bay where a buttressed wall of rocks ran from the cliff out into the lagoon.

As Kalani ran she stooped and caught up a handful of the coral grit, flinging it fair into the face of Stein, who grasped at her and then fell back blinded. Weissman, outpaced, fumbled with his gun, half-minded to shoot yet desiring above all things to capture her.

Pfeiffer was close upon her, too close for another scoop of sand. Kalani swerved and the Teuton's clutching hand caught at her kilt, held it. As he called out in his triumph, with one deft movement she ungirdled herself and sped, a South Sea Atalanta, perfect in her virgin beauty, straight for the point of rocks.

She sensed that one missile was as another, whether backed by fire or bow-string, so she zigzagged as she ran while Weissman cursed at Pfeiffer for his failure and blundered on.

Pfeiffer fired and the bullet struck the beach, wet with the ebb, the bullet sending up a spurt of sand close at the heels of the flying girl. Weissman turned on him savagely.

"Come on, you pig-dog," he cried. "Run, don't shoot. We'll get her at the rocks. She can't climb them."

He himself angled off to tide-edge. He still meant to head her off by the threat of lead. If she tried to swim for it he would cripple her.

For a moment Kalani's figure was lost against the dark ledges of the lava, as if she had found an opening door in the solid rock. Then for a second she appeared profiled, leaping to where the promontory prowed into the lagoon. The moon turned her golden bronze to silver as she shot out, curving in her dive, the bag with the pearls pendulous.

Weissman rushed into the lace-edge of the tide in time to see the circling ripples spreading in phosphorescent radiants from

where the waters had closed above her. He steadied himself with one arm on the rock, and tried to control his aim, his pistol-hand shaky with his anger, the speed of the race and the effects of Kalani's *ju-jutsu*, waiting for her to rise.

She broke water twenty yards away, her long hair afloat like seaweed, her head upraised, looking shoreward. He fired, again and again, spraying the water all about her as fast as he could press the trigger. His target had gone, swift as a loon dives at the flash of the gun or the movement of the hunter, but it seemed impossible that he had missed her. Pfeiffer came lumbering up and Weissman took his gun away from him, watching for another chance. But the dark head showed no more.

CHAPTER IX

WIZARD AND QUEEN

BY THE pool of Manoa the tribe of Talofah camped in silence. Only the low crooning wail of the women mourning their dead sounded weirdly. Upolu lay tossing in a fever that rapidly mounted. Flesh wounds, even the great loss of blood, his soundness would have soon surmounted; but the splintering of bones, the shock of the bullets, aggravated by his own efforts, had sadly lowered his vitality.

Schoenwald's shot, that had smashed his rib and glanced around his flank, had been fired at such point-blank range that the flesh had been seared and fouled with powder stains and the poison of the exploding gas. The island pharmacopœia held styptics and febrifuges, bonesets and soothing laxatives but of true antiseptics nothing. If a wound gangrened the patient usually died. And Upolu's wounds were already badly inflamed. An old hag kept the bandages moist and his shoulder had been splinted with some skill, so he slept fitfully.

The islanders were fighting with fear. The magic, the magic of these strangers, held them in thrall. A minute or two of confusion, fire coming from the hands of the whites, fire and a stink of acrid smoke that yet lingered in their nostrils, and ten of their number were dead. They whispered their names to each other as they sat in huddled groups. The word had passed round that Kalani had disappeared. And Upolu was dying.

As the moon rose and the night wind whispered in the forest their souls shriveled, and when the sharp bark of the pistols came up from the beach they shuddered like dry leaves in an eddy. Where was Taku? Had he too succumbed? Was it he now being killed by the spit-fires—he or Kalani? Given an open foe, men like themselves, given something they were familiar with, and they would fight to the last gasp. But here was magic—big magic. Look at Upolu! And the ten men dead!

To the remotest island come whispers of the outer world, from outcasts of the sea, from solitary survivors of internecine wars, drifting ashore. But these whispers are distorted, gaining at each repetition.

The fabled anthropophagi, the unicorn of the ancients, were all based on crumbs of fact. So to Talofah had floated murmurs of these magic weapons, but they had barely believed them. Wondering, catching eagerly at the unknown, they had still discounted such things as traveler's tales, the sea-yarns of those seeking to curry favor and importance.

But now the exaggerated rumors were accepted as par. The strangers were demons. How could they rid the land of them, how placate them?

One old man, whose skin, shrunken as it was, enfolded him like an alligator's hide, found an audience for his whispers as he searched his doddering memory for legends of evil spirits and reports of the fire-masters who could scorch with their breath, who could move in canoes without sail or paddles and talk, it was said, across a hundred leagues.

The death-chants of the women accentuated his utterances. He swelled with the knowledge of his power. For long a nuisance, he was now become a soothsayer; the tribe hung upon his words. And he embellished his sentences while the wailing acted as a chorus.

"Alas! Alas, they are gone!

Gone forever.

In their strength, in their strength,

They lie like the vines after storm.

The fire flashed! Lo, it pierced them,

Stabbed, as a spear goes through flesh.

Their blood flowed and their souls

Went out on the tide of their manhood!

Alas, they are gone!

Gone like the stars at morning;

Never to shine again!

These are the names of the dead.

Tumani. Alas for Tumani!

Alas for his wife, for his children!

Tumani and Puli, Puli the mighty hunter:

Valia, Majuru, Varua——"

"They say," said the ancient in his cackling treble, while the islanders, now in the full grip of superstitious dread, like children listening to the story of a vampire by some foolish nurse, gathered closer, "they say that such weapons can kill at once as many as all my toes and fingers. If we had been in ranks, now, instead of scattered, we might all be dead and in the uttermost darkness."

"And yet ye are alive!" sounded a mocking voice.

Like a covey of partridge when the hawk's shadow darkens the islanders cowered before the figure that had appeared in the midst of them, a figure strangely tall in the blotchy moonlight where it stood, glowing with blue flame, weirdly caparisoned.

It was Taku in full regalia, mounted on a knoll, his flesh and the rattling bones that festooned him smeared with phosphorescent wood, a mask on his face shaped like that of the god in the cliff temple, girt with streaming lengths of women's hair and gray beards.

"You, Toluku, have lived beyond your time," he said ominously, and the ancient faltered and tried to creep away into the shadow.

Only the croon of the women went on. This dirge was their duty to the dead. Taku would not disapprove of that. But he silenced them.

"I have come from the temple," he said. "I have spoken with the god!"

He spoke boldly, following up his plan, but through the slitted wood of his mask he gazed furtively about for Kalani. Perhaps she was asleep. So much the better. He would talk while he had the chance.

"Come into council," he said, and the headmen gathered about the mound where he squatted above them like a festering devil.

Taku had them in his thrall. He knew it and rejoiced in it. The whispering night with the terror that gripped them, the tales old Toluku had been telling, had delivered them over to him again. If Kalani had been about it might have been different. But now they were plastic clay.

They hung on his words and they approved them, so cleverly in tune were they with their own thoughts.

"I have spoken with the god," said Taku. "And this has been given to me. These white men with their magic are also very wise. So must they be met with cunning until we too acquire their wisdom. Doubt not that I, Taku, will learn the mystery of their weapons, but as yet it is strange to me, as my magic is strange to them. Now, lest they use their strength upon us too swiftly, as a wrestler with a new trick overcomes many champions for the time, let us talk softly with them. Presently they will depart in friendship and we shall be mighty as they, having learned their secrets. A man who swims against the tide is a fool to waste his strength. But if he waits until the tide turns he may go far without trouble.

"And if we withstand them now in our weakness and ignorance, not ten but a hundred of us may find burials in the bellies of the sharks as Tumani, Puli and the rest. For from the cliff-temple I saw the strangers pile the bodies in a canoe and set it on the tide that carried it beyond the reef where the big sharks nuzzled it until it overturned. And who among you would give up wife and children and pleasant days to be shot through with fire and tossed to the sharks for scrapmeat? Ten men of us they killed and now Upolu lies dying. The hand of death is heavy on the island. The song of death is wandering in the trees."

He paused and the tribe cowered. The wind was no greater than another night but their hearts were attuned to fear.

"Kalani too is gone," intoned a man.

Taku's evil spirit leaped.

"Kalani has gone!" he echoed. "Where has Kalani gone?"

He spoke cryptically, in wizard fashion, and obtained the literal answer that he sought.

"Utu saw her descending to the beach."

Taku hid his exultation. He had heard the shots but had come out on the cliffs too late to figure their meaning, seeing only the sea burial.

"The strangers have destroyed her with their magic," he cried. "Kalani is dead!"

And all the crowd sent up their ululating wail of anguish.

"Alas, Kalani the heaven-born is dead!"



BROUGHT back from weakness and delirium, Upolu stirred feebly at the cry and raised himself on an elbow.

"Who says Kalani is dead?" he asked.

"Taku the wizard," answered the crones about him.

"Taku the liar," came the clear challenge, and Kalani issued into the full moonlight.

She had taken her bearings when she came up from her dive and, too fast for Weissman's uncertain aim, had plunged again and traveled submerged to the underwater entrance of a cave, rising in a pool at the bottom of a shaft fissured, perhaps, in olden volcanic days and widened by the lunging seas. It was half choked with jungle-growth, and through this she had reached the top, speeding through the bush toward Manoa, there to find clothes for her nakedness and arrive in time to hear Taku's harangue.

"If Death is abroad tonight," she said contemptuously, "then he is blind, for surely I have passed him on the way. And I have faced the magic of these strangers, yet am I alive. Did thy god on the cliff tell thee that, Taku, or did I hear thee say that I was dead?"

Women, they say, were ever the earliest proselytes. Doubtless Kalani held her faiths but she had also her disbeliefs. Any god that Taku used to back his words she was inclined to doubt. Moreover, the god in question had of late years been in disfavor, having proved either very deaf or lazy in certain times of stress. His temple had moldered; he was far from popular, even with Taku, until the wizard had enlivened him for the occasion.

"He is a greater god than the god of the *Merikani*," retorted Taku stubbornly. "Is not the war-cloth torn and fouled?"

"As you will be, O Taku, if you traffic with these men whom we rescued from the sea, whom we fed and to whom we sought to do honor. And because they do these things, because they have killed ten of your brothers, you would go to them and say, 'Do not kill us and we will be your slaves; we will bring to you our wives and our maids for your pleasure, and our little children that they may run your errands.'

"Your chief lies wounded, yet he killed one of them with his bare hands and sorely hurt their leader, for all his magic. Tonight their leader sought to kill me many

times and I made a mock of him. Is there blood in your veins or the milk of coconuts?

"Do I speak to old and helpless women? Am I the only man among you? As for you, Taku, with your whisper from your god, I tell you that you are afraid. I did not notice you in the fight. Perhaps you were busy cleaning out the pool into which I tossed you and your magic not so long ago."

There was no laugh at this. Kalani saw that she had not yet keyed up her people and Taku quickly took up the clue.

"Aye, I am afraid," he said soberly. "I have often been afraid, Kalani. Afraid when I have gone down into the caves of death and spoken with spirits, afraid when I have sought to learn the wisdom of the gods; but I have done these things. And now listen to the whisper from my god."

With this ghostly luminosity still wispig to him and his garments he stood erect, pointing a finger at the heavens. Suddenly he made a quick swoop and affected to capture something that he held close to the mouthpiece of his mask, whispering to it. Once again he flung up his hand and something flitted away up and over the trees. It was a bat; and bats, said the sooth-tellers, were the spirits of the wicked dead.

Kalani stamped her foot. She knew it was a trick of Taku's. Bats were common enough. She did not like them but she was not afraid of them save as they might get into her hair. But these people of hers—

"Listen," said Taku.

Out of the void above them, apparently, came a throaty, squeaky voice, the ventriloquial voice of Taku practised behind the mask. But to the Talofans it was the voice of an unseen, of a god talking from the beyond.

"My voice is the voice of Taku," came the sounds, twice repeated.

"The voice of Taku whom I threw into the pool because he sought the life of Upolu," said Kalani. The challenge was down. "Where is Vaega?" she asked.

But Vaega, still resentful, would not become a witness. Somewhere in the dark she hid herself.

"Then we will wait until morning," said Kalani, "since you are all afraid of the dark. Then if Taku without his spirit-face, without clothing save his loin-cloth, can catch a bat and let us hear the voice of his god, I will listen to it."

The argument was faulty, since bats were not likely to be about by daylight, but she was fighting against the cowardice that Taku had bred among them.

"Now listen to my plans. Tomorrow we will gather weapons and make them. Then I will lead you in this fashion. Those who are afraid to follow a woman may stay home and after this they shall do the cooking. As for you, Taku, I challenge you and your god. These strangers you so greatly fear could not kill me. Now if your god is so powerful, if your voice is his voice and his will yours, let him try to kill me, for I know that you greatly desire to see me dead just now."

She stood on the mound opposite the wizard, and for all her supreme challenge her heart pounded within her and a thousand strings of superstition tugged at her spirit. But Taku would not take up the gage.

"It is not fitting that we two, heaven-born, should quarrel at such a time," he said. "Tell us your plan and if it is good, if it is better than mine, all here will know it and approve."

The gathering backed him. Kalani summoned all her powers of oratory and at last caught them in the net of her own human witchery, her appeals to them, the story of their ancient greatness, talking to them as men, as warriors, as lovers and fathers, whipping them until they hung upon her eloquence as if she were indeed an inspired prophetess. Her plan was simple and it appealed to them so that they subscribed to it with some show of fervor.

Taku gave way, smiling behind his mask. He knew that the flames kindled at the fire of oratory soon died down, and he bided his opportunity. Even Kalani, worn by her efforts, bending at last above Upolu's couch, felt depression. And when the morning came and some sixty of the warriors, with Taku, were missing, she was not greatly surprised.

"Let them go, the cowards!" she said scornfully. "There will be less weapons to make."

CHAPTER X

KNAVE AGAINST KNAVE

INDIGNANT at the treacherous strangers, anxious for revenge on account of her lover as well as the indignities offered herself, angry at Taku and wrought

up by the apathy of her own people, Kalani's judgment was in fault. She underestimated the wizard.

To her, happy in her love, there had appeared no signs of impatience among the hot-blooded bachelors of the tribe concerning the peaceful conditions on Talofah. Taku had seen these hints and fostered them. To Kalani the suggestion of a revolution or a rebellion of any sort among the Talofans would have been intolerable; to Taku such a ferment was a patent thing to be worked to his own advantage.

The wizard had not spoken altogether idly when he had told Kalani that she and he together could go far. His ambition was elastic and already well stretched. Through Kalani he meant first to be master of Talofah, but beyond that he saw dimly the development of an empire of islands. His was the nature that hated to watch things go too placidly, much as a boy cannot resist tossing a stone into a placid pool to see the fish start and the rings of water spread.

His magic, the knowledge that made him wizard, was not all tricks and mummery. He had a working knowledge of many of the stars and knew when to expect the constellations to appear above or sink below the horizons. Handed down from priesthood to priesthood was the ability to guess position through the angle of the sun's declination.

He even had crude charts showing the major currents and other islands, marked as so many days' journey distant at certain seasons, when the winds blew northeast or southwest. Hazily marked they were, with unverified notes about the tribes that occupied them. They were named "The Isle of Fire," "The Isle of the Man-Eaters," and so on.

It was all embryonic but, even as the adventurers of the middle ages pondered the rude maps of Ptolemy and other cartographers and dreamed their dreams of conquest, so Taku had his visions. Power, to offset his limp, power, to rule all men and women through fear, power to indulge his own appetites; he was obsessed with it.

So while Kalani urged the manufacture of her weapons, Taku, in a shady glen, harangued the nucleus of his army-to-be.

Even as Kalani had labored with the tribe the night previous, so he, yet more cunningly, strove with them. He hinted at

Kalani's feminine tyrannies, he probed old grievances, he brought up unsuccessful wooings and plucked at the deep-sounding strings of sex and blood-lust.

He had one most powerful argument. When the *Merikani* had rescued the forefathers of the tribe, there had been far more men than women saved. It had been a survival of the strongest, and ever since for some reason—possibly because there had been little or no warfare to decimate the number of the males—there had been fewer women than men upon Talofah.

The Polynesian, living on such paradises as Talofah, is inherently amorous, inclined to be polygamous. But by force of circumstance there were many warriors unwed upon Talofah and rigorous tabus had been made to keep the marital vows respected. The South-Sea Islander is naturally a fighter. There had not been enough fighting on the island in two generations to keep them practised in their weapons.

"It was not idly that Kalani called you women," said Taku. "Men were made for fighting and for loving. But you lie upon the beaches and sigh for women that are forbidden you. The chiefs take first choice and there are not enough girls left to go round. Does not every man wish a son of his own?"

He told them wondrous tales of adjacent islands where women were plentiful and fresh sights were to be seen. He stirred up a Viking soul within them, talking of Homeric combats and the joys of victory.

He painted to them vivid pictures of villages aflame, with them, the conquerors, sweeping down upon the maids who ran shrieking yet not all reluctant to yield to the stronger, of feasts and looting, of the fierce glory of battle when the blood runs red upon the beach or streaks the sea where the war canoes are locked in combat.

True sagas he gave them of the deeds of their ancestors and so, little by little, with consummate art, built up the vision of a new kingdom in which they would be the leaders, so that each one of them thought it the brilliant conceit of his own brain.

When the moment was ripe he spoke contemptuously of Kalani and Upolu as love-sick rulers, content to feast and sleep while their people brought them tribute, neglecting even to provide wives for the young warriors by an extension of their kingdom.

He had them afire by noon, blood-lust

and sex-lust seething within them. All their desires were to be attained by a pact with the strangers, from whom Taku would obtain the secret of their magic. Taku himself had real confidence in his ability to do this eventually; he conceived the strangers as his slaves, rendering him their knowledge as homage in exchange for life and food.

He had taken care to provide a plentiful supply of *karwa* for the palaver, and when he left them to approach Weissman, both they and he himself were hypnotized by his specious promises.

One thing he did, at dawn, that marked his leadership. He sent ten of his men down to the Summer palace and village on the beach for the weapons hidden in the rafters of the roofs. On their way back, successful, they had met the runners dispatched by Kalani for the same purpose and laughed in their palms as they evaded them, thinking of their discomfiture. Taku had not yet worked them up to thoughts of using these arms against their fellows and they merely took a childish delight in outwitting Kalani's messengers.

Nor did the latter know their loss, for despite all caution one of Weissman's sentinels had heard some noises and fired a warning rifle in their direction. Thinking the whole beach patrolled, they returned and reported that the white men were sleepless and could see in the dark.

Kalani, harassed by the condition of Upolu, who raved in his fever and tried to tear off his bandages, only shrugged her shapely shoulders of golden satin and forced work on the armament.

In the afternoon she sent a hundred warriors to the cliff-tops that commanded the cove where Weissman had set up his camp. These, returning at nightfall with their work completed, reported that the delinquents were singing drunkenly in a glen.

"Their names are marked," she said. "I have spoken. After this they shall kindle the fires and help the women with the cooking."

One thing they failed to report, the fact that Taku had obtained an interview with Weissman. But this was not their fault as they had purposely avoided the edge of the cliff for fear of being observed and the foliage that had screened them had also screened the actions of the wizard.

Taku had dressed carefully for his audi-

ence with Weissman. He was not sure of his initial reception though he felt certain of his welcome once he commenced to speak. He had many things to offer. When Kalani had called him a coward, she was wrong. When Taku had admitted that he had often been afraid, he was telling the absolute truth.

He was afraid of the strength of other men in physical competition; he was often afraid of the dark and the things he thought he saw there. But his ambition spurred him, even through the worst places. Napoleon was afraid of the unseen. Not that Taku was a Napoleon. He was simply a selfish savage with more brains than the average, and a protected profession.

How far Weissman would regard this protection he could not tell. But he knew that Weissman knew island customs and, though he had never seen Taku, might respect him enough as a wizard if he recognized him as one before he unloosed one of those fire-spitters.



THEREFORE Taku, sneaking down to his devil-cave, took especial pains with his toilet. He discarded the mask, and to replace the phosphorescence painted himself with red and white and yellow earths. He hung three necklaces of human teeth about him and added anklets of dog's teeth and feathers and his best bracelets of knuckle-bones.

His crinkly hair, reddened and stiffened with repeated applications of lime, he ornamented with a circlet of dog-hide in which white cockatoo feathers stood upright. Since he was going to talk with men, he did not overdress, leaving off his robe and trusting to a hardwood staff to offset his limp. Jangling shells strung on sennit made up a sort of kilt and completed his costume. On the top of his staff was fixed the upper part of a man's skull, the conjuror's scepter. He looked at himself in the pool and approved the toilet.

Then he plucked the badge of amity, a green palm leaf, and skulked along the beach in the growths at the foot of the cliffs, paused before he rounded the crescent of the big bay, at the opposite horn to where Kalani had balked pursuit, and wormed his way through a low, wave-worn archway that sloped upward, following some softer stratum in the rock.

Its farther end was choked with brush.

This Taku parted and peered out upon the cove where Weissman had made camp. He was going to be very sure that Weissman was about before he exposed himself. And he had another trick or two in hand.

Twelve feet below him paced Pfeiffer with a rifle, guardian against attack by sea or around the promontory. Taku chuckled quietly. These white men were not invincible. If he had brought a javelin along he could have easily killed the man. Even a well-flung stone might dispose of him.

But he had further-reaching plans. The brush masked the tunnel-mouth most effectively. Pfeiffer was altogether unsuspecting. Once or twice he looked up the cove toward the waterfall with some impatience and twice he sniffed the air. Taku suppressed his chuckle once again. The white man was hungry. He could smell the cooking but since he was sentinel he had to wait his relief. The smell was appetizing. It was young pig; and at last Pfeiffer could stand it no longer and whistled shrilly.

A head appeared above the clumps of rocks close to the waterfall, where the shelters had been put up, and some words were shouted in the strangers' own uncouth language. Across the cove Taku saw another sentry. Presently three men sauntered out from the rocks and one went to the man on the far side of the little bay while two walked toward Pfeiffer. One of these was Weissman.

Taku waited until they were close under him and then he projected his voice as he had done when he mimicked the voice of the god. Weissman stopped and drew his pistol while the relieving sentry and Pfeiffer threw up their rifles to the ready, all scanning the rocky promontory. But they did not look near the mouth of the tunnel and Taku quietly chuckled once more. They were very simple, these white strangers, he thought. He repeated the call.

"It is Taku, the wizard, who comes in peace, bringing good news to the leader of the strangers."

"Then come," said Weissman impatiently.

"The voice of the stranger is angry; he and the two with him hold the weapons that spit fire as if they might use them. I am alone and I bring good news."

"Where the devil is he?" queried Weissman. "I have seen no wizard since we

landed. It might be a good idea to talk with him. If he wasn't on hand with the rest he may have had some reason for it. They are a cunning set, these priests."

All this Taku could not interpret. He went on.

"I come in peace. I bear a palm branch. And I bear news that will be useful."

"Come on," exploded Weissman in the island dialect. "If there is more than one of you you die. If one we will talk in peace."

He shifted to his own gutturals.

"He's somewhere there on the top of the rocks to my left, Pfeiffer. You and Stein stand ready."

Taku slid out of the tunnel, free of the brush, and stood upon a ledge, his skull-capped staff erect, his palm branch upheld, before they noticed him. He hid a smile under the other veneering of his features. He had appeared from nowhere, as a wizard should. And he had made the white men start. It was an auspicious beginning.

It did not take long for two sinisters of the types of Weissman and Taku to get familiar. The skin of one was brown, of the other white; their hearts were equally black. Knave against knave, each thought his was the higher suit. But they understood each other in the main.

Weissman, his swollen features puckered to a semblance of a friendly grin, acquiesced in the terms of Taku, with reservations. It seemed very clear. This cursed American flag was a fetish of the tribe that the wizard had long resented as a hindrance to his own full control of the superstitions of the people. He did not approve of it, therefore he had kept away from the feast; and he had secretly rejoiced at Weissman's actions. There was a half-truth in this that sauced Taku's rendering, and so far Taku scored.

The wizard, Weissman gathered, wanted Kalani, first to cement his power, then out of revenge for a slight she had put upon him. Taku bargained that Kalani should be his after they had conquered Talofah.

Weissman was glad to hear that Kalani was alive. But he had no idea of letting Taku have her. He intended her for himself, for what he termed his amusement. That evened the score of mental reservation. But there was a question he wanted to ask the wizard.

"Why did she come down to the beach at night?"

"Perhaps to see that the dead were buried. I do not know as to that. She was alone. Perhaps to see if the weapons in the rafters had been left undisturbed. But those we have secured. It might have been for the pearls."

Taku saw a light glow in the crafty eyes of Weissman and was swift to appraise it. A dim memory took shape, that certain men prized these oyster stones greatly. White men?

"Pearls?" asked Weissman carelessly. "She has pearls?"

"Many of them. As many as my two fists, open thus, might hold. And all are perfect of their kind. The biggest Upolu lately gave to her. I think she came for that one most of all."

Skipping the exact interpretation of some of the words, Weissman sensed the general meaning. Pearls, that might be of great value. A decided asset. Gems that could be transmuted into many things—rank, enjoyments.

"You may have those," said Taku, following every indication he could read. "Upolu was the man who struck you."

"Ah!" Weissman indrew the ejaculation with a hiss. "I want him also."

"I think he will be dead by tomorrow," said Taku, and this time his chuckle was unconcealed. "If not we will share him, you and I. He is the lover of Kalani. But he is too weak to suffer much. Kalani! I shall humble her first; then his joints shall be cracked and he shall be swung from a pole by his feet. Afterward——!" He licked his lips.

"That is afterward. Now, of these plans of Kalani, and this army of yours?"

Taku bent over and began to make tracings in the sand with his finger.

"It will be the hour before dawn," he said. "Thus they will come ——"

CHAPTER XI

THE FIRE-SPITTERS

THE cove given to Weissman by Kalani was a minor bay, shaped like a mule-shoe, deeply indented, backed by high cliffs over which poured the cascade that supplied fresh water. Close by the pool of the waterfall the shade-shelters against the sun had been erected. In the hour before dawn the camp-fires of the strangers glowed low

beside the pool, their smoke ascending to where Kalani's warriors caught the pungency of it in their nostrils that dilated as the time for combat approached.

Kalani herself was with them, the half of her army. Reluctantly she had left Upolu in the care of the women, his life fluctuating in the balante as a mass of weed swings in the eddy between tides.

But to her Talofah came first, as she knew it would have come to Upolu. Afterward might come the rejoicing or the sorrow. She was the inspiration to her men and she hoped by her presence to strike home the blow that would crush these arrogant strangers.

On the brow of the cliff were piled great boulders, ready to crash down upon the sleeping camp. A heap of dry wood was piled ready to leap into a signal fire. Beside it red ashes, kept alive by fanning, were carefully shielded from giving out reflection.

Along the lagoon four canoes, laden with the rest of the defenders, rested on their paddles and waited for the flame to spring out above. They were crowded deep with men armed with crude weapons that, in their brawny arms, were terribly effective. Hunks of ragged stone were lashed in split handles; lances and javelins were jagged with bone and sharks' teeth.

The attack was to be simultaneous. First the great boulders, tumbling down upon the sleepers in the faint hour when man's spirit is weakest, then the massed rush from the dark sea. The sentinels, if they were set, would be drowsy, suspecting nothing, peevishly awaiting the dawn. There would be no warning. A tongue of fire, an avalanche of rocks, the inrush of the sentries and the confusion in the dark and then with churning paddles the flotilla would sweep from two ways round the capes. There would be stabs and blows and—what could eight men do against a hundred and fifty warriors and later the same number, descending from the cliffs?

At midnight Taku's backsliders had been seen and heard about their fire in the glen, half drunken with *kawa*, some chanting, others asleep. Tomorrow, thought Kalani vindictively, they would be doing menial work while the children mocked them. Taku himself, heaven-born though he was, should not miss his degradation.

In the lagoon the paddlemen set their

blades against the ebb as lee boards, barely moving them, save for one occasional, long, timed sweep that sent off long swirling streaks of sea-fire. They were nervous. They had gone out to battle without the usual preliminaries. There had been no pulse-quickenings of drums, no songs of bygone victories or predictions of those to come, no bated breath and quick eyes of women to urge them on.

Few of them had ever fought in anything but minor skirmishes. And now they were out against magic. Their muscles quivered on their broad shoulders and their features twitched as they watched the cliffs.

Kalani stood beside the wood pile, palm torch in hand, watching the star she had chosen as the hand of her war clock to sink behind the shoulder of the mountain. Faint sighs laden with aromatic balm swept over the island. The palm fronds waved in black plumes against the sky of purple velvet, star-studded. There were more stars in the lagoon, bright reflections of the originals. The Milky Way seemed to shimmer across the heavens like a diamond-dusted veil.

Kalani stood like a statue of ebony in the blackness, her outlines faintly limned by the live ashes that a warrior kept crimson with a palm leaf. She said nothing, but her thoughts repeated the chant to the *Merikani* as she watched the heavens.

White, white are the stars;
White on the blue:
They are the eyes of the gods,
The gods of the *Merikani*.
Ever unwinking and watchful,
Seeing the deeds of men.

The acts of the strangers had not shaken her faith in the legend of her race. There were simply bad white men as there were bad brown men. And, as the *Merikani* had rescued her people, so would she avenge the insult done through them to her race. The star, spoked from its central planet, wheeled lower, dipped to the crag, sparkled and was gone.

She bent with the torch; the warrior blew the ashes to a flare. Kalani applied it to the cunningly piled wood and twenty more palm fans sped the red flowers blossoming in the dark.

One clear call Kalani sent out to sea between her cupped hands.

"O-he! O-he!"

With her open hands she sent the first

stone thundering over the brink to land fairly on the thatched roof of a shelter, beneath which she fondly hoped Weissman was sleeping. In the lagoon the star reflections were broken to fragments and the phosphorescence streaked as the paddlers, released from their strain, dug their blades into the stiff resistance and, yelling from brazen throats, sent the canoes surging to the beach while the rest brandished their weapons and the rocks came pounding down from the heights.

The moon had sunk, but with unclouded stars there is never absolute darkness in the tropics. The canoemen targeted themselves with their voices, with the spurts of sea-phosphor that flamed at each stroke of their paddles, surged about the prows of the canoes and trailed them with fiery wakes.

The craft were thick-packed with men as herrings in a barrel. They had made a long détour to get the four available canoes from a distant point, not caring to risk obtaining those on the beach by the palace, and now the freeboards were within three fingers' breadth of the water.

They dashed shoreward in irregular formation, each anxious to be the first to land. But before the warriors could spring out thigh-deep in their impatience, a crackling darting line of fire broke out from the clump of coral that paralleled the edge of the beach, just above high-water mark.

Repeating rifles, handled by men who were all fair marksmen by dint of frequent target practise on Temeteri in their leisure hours, pumped a leaden spray into the canoes on the cool command of Weissman, taking each craft in turn.

From the cliff the rocks were coming down, demolishing the shelters but doing no harm to an evacuated camp site. And the sight of the steady spitting of fire on the beach, the vicious sound of the reports, the view of the canoes broadside on, paddlers dead and dying, warriors at the mercy of the strangers' magic—all this paralyzed Kalani's company, who knew their boulders could not possibly be hurled far enough to reach the enemy. And they were horribly afraid of this magic that was killing their fellows in the shallows.

The brown fighters, thrown into confusion and terror as the canoes broached and man after man fell into the water, bleeding and drowning, or helping to tangle the mass of their fellows, were in sore straits. The

high-powered charges drove the steel-tipped missiles through flesh and bone, one well-aimed shot often accounting for two or more victims.

They had no idea of how long the firing would continue. To them annihilation threatened from this stream of sputtering flame that vomited death. Some desperately tried to carry the rush up to the beach, but Weissman and his men shot them down with their automatics as they waded out, and the war-cries changed to shouts of dismay as those still able scrambled for paddles, for places in the canoes, and retreated, leaving the dead and dying thrashing in the shoals or lying in the wash of the tide, just beginning to flood.

 KALANI, aghast, scenting treachery in the readiness against attack, rallied her men and ordered them to descend the cliffs to the aid of the canoe-men. But the descent was not an easy one, and while they hesitated to choose a trail Taku's band, half drunk with *kawa*, were upon them from the rear, stabbing, lunging, clubbing. Each of them by order of Weissman had tied about his arm a distinguishing badge of white bark-cloth; but in the shock Kalani's warriors could not tell friend from foe.

Two men, sent in by Taku, rushed Kalani where she stood by the blazing signal that had summoned the sea-party to defeat. They sought to take her alive and, seeing she had no weapon, took the task too easily. She snatched a brand from the fire and thrust it full in the face of one of them. Burned, blinded, he staggered back and toppled over the precipice.

As the other clutched her she set the fiery wood full in the pit of his stomach and held it there, sizzling the tender flesh until he tore loose with a howl. Through the leaves she caught sight of Taku's face and flung the flaming weapon full at him, whirling and whizzing as it went, to spend a shower of sparks on Taku's shoulder.

The fight was over, the surprise attack a failure. Kalani's men were falling back through the thick bush toward Manoa. They held their own against Taku's insurgents now, but dreaded the magic of the strangers' guns that might any moment be turned against them. And Kalani fell back with them, baffled rage in her heart, to the security of the valley pool.

It would have gone hard with Taku could she have sighted him, but the astute wizard was well covered, whispering directions to his men while he himself went down to the beach to report the withdrawal of Kalani to Manoa.

The sky turned gray, the stars disappeared, pale dawn suddenly flushed red as if with shame at the sight of so many gallant fighters swashing in the lap of the flooding tide. The sharks, scenting blood far off, had come in with the rising water and tore at the bodies they could reach until the lagoon was scummed with crimson and the lace-edge of the tide was patterned with scarlet.

Weissman and his men, snatching swift fragments of food, prepared to follow up their victory. Weissman gave orders to Taku after a quick consultation that brought a demon's grin to the wizard's face before he turned away to marshal his forces. They split into two companies and started to climb the crests of the two ridges of the great A, working up to control the heights that looked down upon the Pool of Manoa.

The dawn wind was blowing in from the sea and Weissman tested its strength and direction with a look of satisfaction. He gave a brief order and led the way with weapons reloaded to the scene of the late feast. They bore with them torches kindled from the scattered remnants of the camp-fire, demolished by the falling rocks but regathered and replenished.

Up each ridge of the Manoa Valley Weissman sent three sharpshooters, following the trail of Taku's warriors. They were to establish themselves as close as possible to where the bar of the A crossed the valley and shut off the desolate crater cup from the fruitfulness of the lower ravine. Very near they could not get, on account of the fin-like crests of bare lava, but they were to join Taku's command and keep Kalani's forces herded in the gorge until the trap was sprung.

Weissman and Schwartz set their torches to the grass roof of the palace and then touched off the adjacent buildings. The fire leaped and caught the bush, racing upward while the sea-wind, in intermittent puffs that grew stronger, coaxed the conflagration until it became a fiery furnace, a thing of insatiate appetite, made fiercer as it swallowed up the groves and, flinging flakes

of flame ahead, roared up the narrowing valley, mounting the walls to the timberline, doubling, trebling in intensity as its line shortened.

The wind, now a gale, augmented by the draft created by the fire, drove it on and up toward the pool of Manoa while the riflemen waited for pot-shots and Taku's spear-men stood ready to repel any attempt to escape.

In half an hour the funnel of the valley was like a blast furnace. Explosions from steaming saps bursting to freedom heightened the inferno; great clouds of smoke, shot through with the shrapnel of the updraft, rolled heavily in billows of sepia, ruddy below, orange edged, drifting through the rifts of the high peaks as if Talofah were once more in the volcanic convulsions of its birth.

The crests were soon untenable, long before the flames licked at their flanks. The barren and denuded lava kept the flames confined to the main gorge but the precipitous walls acted as sides to an oven and soon, from beach to crater-lip, Manoa, once a miniature Eden, was a glowing mass of fiery fury.

Pfeiffer, returning with Taku, reported.

"We couldn't do much shooting on account of the heat and the haze and smoke. But we saw them scrambling up the cross-ridge into the crater. Taku says there's no water there, and no food. All we have got to do is to keep them penned until they surrender, and that won't be long."

"How about the woman?" demanded his leader, thinking mostly of the pearls.

"Kalani? She was giving out the orders. None of us fired at her. She'll come in with the rest. What's the next move?"

"We'll have to keep them from coming out, as soon as the ridges cool off. That will be a simple job. After the wizard's men have made sure of stopping the spread of the fire we'll set them to work getting out timber for a ship. One of us is to stick close to Taku. He understands that at the first sign of disobedience he leads the way into what they call 'the uttermost darkness' for the rest of them."

And Taku did understand. He was not altogether happy. The way in which Weissman had handled the whole affair led him to doubt seriously his too hastily formed impression that the white men could be used in catering to his personal ambitions.

CHAPTER XII

THE WINDWARD CLIFFS

KALANI retreated reluctantly to the pool of Manoa, hurrying her footsteps as she came in sight of the Winter village, anxious to find out how Upolu was faring. She had left him aswing on a wide hammock underneath a breadfruit grove, his virility vanquished by the fever of his wounds; at times unconscious, at others delirious, too smitten to recognize face or voice.

The fever raged in his great frame but his reserves were plentiful and fought back hard. Only the flank wound suppurated, and that the women kept fomented with constant applications of water.

Kalani had made bright the armor of her spirit but now she felt its weight in the dual bitterness of defeat and the knowledge that Taku had turned traitor and divulged her plans to the enemy. Otherwise she felt sure they must have won. She summoned all her will to shake off the despondency so that her voice, even if Upolu did not recognize it, would be cheery to his ears.

She outstripped the rest, who had definitely shaken off Taku's force, and came running toward the grove. Some elder women came forward as if to engage her in talk but she brushed them aside and her eyes flamed at what she saw.

Vaega was bending over the hammock, her face close to Upolu's. Kalani caught the murmur of endearing words; an answer, too low to be distinguished, from Upolu. The sick chief raised a feeble hand and Vaega caught it, guiding it about her neck.

The steps of Kalani made no sound on the thick, short grass. Kalani spoke no word but Vaega stiffened, gently set aside the hand and arm of Upolu, flung back her tresses and stood up, her black eyes full of challenge, facing Kalani across the hammock.

Her fingers crept to her girdle where she carried the woman's weapon, the "defender-of-virtue"—a single, serrated tooth of great size, selected from the biggest of the tiger-sharks, the root base of its triangle set in a curving strip of wood to which was attached a loop of sennit, woven to fit the middle finger of the owner.

This, thrust into the soft flesh of a rival's stomach or used against a ravisher, could be ripped to form a nasty, often dangerous

wound, bound to leave at the best a disfiguring scar that would be a mockery for all the tribe. Jealous women sometimes tore each other's cheeks with it; every maid was supposed to carry one.

But under the steady anger and contempt in Kalani's gaze Vaega's fingers faltered. She tossed her head as though to say:

"You saw me. His arm was about my neck. He spoke to me. Now what?"

Kalani had no weapon save her wrath and that she held, lest its outburst might disturb her lover. Only her eyes burned into Vaega's. Upolu spoke.

"Kalani, do not leave me, pulse of my heart!"

Kalani's face softened, then grew triumphant. Vaega's apparent triumph was an empty one. In his coma Upolu had taken her for Kalani. The princess spoke one word.

"Go!"

Vaega tried to hold her ground. She had not even to face Kalani. The latter had turned away and was beckoning to the warriors who came trooping wearily in. But as they formed in front of her Vaega, accepting herself at Kalani's valuation, retreated from the hammock.

At Kalani's order two men seized her and marched her some distance away. There Kalani followed with the men, giving one gesture to the remainder who, scenting a tribunal, formed a semi-circle of expectancy.

"Vaega," said Kalani, "because you have loved, I can forgive much. Because you were a fool and listened to the schemes of Taku, you shall be punished. Therefore I, Kalani, pronounce you tabu. Whoever shall speak to you, shall offer you meat or drink or shelter until the tabu is removed, shall very surely die. And you shall die with them. I have spoken. Now go."

The challenge of hate flamed between them but the cold demeanor of the tribe soon tempered that of Vaega the outcast. They looked at her with the eyes of those who gaze upon a dead stranger. Slowly she turned and went down into the forest toward the beach.

A warrior touched Kalani by the arm and pointed. Creeping out upon the barren rock of a ridge showed the figures of Taku's men. They crawled along the perilous ledges for a little way and then squatted, gazing down upon the camp. Others

showed upon the opposite crest. But they made no attempt to descend into the valley.

"Let them stay there," said Kalani. "Let them perch like hungry gulls. As for us, we will eat and then take counsel."

She affected to ignore them, forcing herself to eat, superintending the making of a broth from pigeons for Upolu, but she saw that all were close to cover. The vision of that sputter of guns, the spurts of fire, the shouts of terror coming up from the lagoon, was constant.

Soon the strangers would arrive, sending their speedy messengers of death into the valley. Even the nights were against the Talofans, only three hours of actual darkness, and the moon not yet at the full. She cudgelled her brains for some stratagem while she assumed a confident mien to hearten her men.

The meal was barely over. There was a sound of some one running through the thick woods, up from the sea. Out of the forest broke Vaega, panting, her mouth awry, her features twisted with her efforts; Vaega the tabu, defying death, horror in her white-circled eyes, halting with tumultuous bosom, struggling for speech as she pointed backward with one trembling arm.

"Fire! They have set the trees on fire!"

On the crests Taku's warriors were standing up exultant, brandishing their spears at the beleaguered tribe and shouting taunts that came only as faint, staccato whispers. Above the forest smoke was curling. The sea-wind brought the taint of burning wood and crisping leaves.

Almost immediately followed a crackling sound that steadily, swiftly deepened to a roar. The purpose of the watching warriors on the ridges was plain. To beat down the efforts of those climbing those steep slopes was an easy task. Besides, the fire-spitters would soon join them.

The women huddled in fright that showed signs of frenzy. The men gazed helplessly at each other in front of this new, implacable foe from which, wedged in as they were, they knew no way of escape. Kalani sprang up the slopes of the crossing ridge and paused half-way. The fire was clear across the valley and mounting with intensified fury for every yard of the advance. She leaped down and issued orders.

"To the crater!"

Then, as they hesitated, she repeated the command.

"There is no water there, nor any living thing," ventured an elder.

She turned on him like a wildcat.

"Fool! Can you live here much longer? We will get water in the dark. Hasten. You come with me, and you—and you!"

She picked six of the lustiest and set them to carrying the litter of Upolu. For the first part of the climb they were able to follow a gully that gave them some protection. Then she drove the rest of them like sheep. The heat of the fire was plainly manifest; the smoke was over their heads and a lower haze crept in among them.

A shot cracked from the ridge and a warrior fell gasping.

"They can't stay there long," cried Kalani. "Up!"

With all her heart following Upolu, she stayed there to the last, seeing that gourds and calabashes were filled and coconuts carried up with all the food that was available. No one save the litter-carriers was allowed to mount empty-handed. A few shots were fired but none came near her and the marksmen were baffled by the growing haze. The fire jumped ahead along the sparser foliage of the ridges and soon drove off the enemy.



AT LAST the final man tumbled over the rim of the crater, forming the extreme angle of the A, a pit of desolation. From smooth slopes of black ashes, turning sulfur-yellow under foot, lumps of lava protruded in strange shapes. A rubble of it filled the throat of the ancient caldera, plug to the fireless shaft. There was no water. Nothing grew there save a spiky shrub like a Spanish bayonet whose leaves were covered with gray filaments.

Above them rolled the smoke, a merciful cloak for the sun that would later beat down upon them. The side-walls buttressed into the flinty peaks of Talofah lofting high above them, barren, rent by quake and polished by wind and rain, untenable even for goats, utterly barren.

Beyond the cross-ridge rumbled the fire, its bursts of flame reflected on the under surface of the clouds from whose dun bellies dropped scraps of cindered wood and a sifting rain of fluffy ash.

Kalani rigged a canopy of bark-cloth on spears driven into the cracks among the lava and managed to sling Upolu's hammock. The climb seemed to have done him

no harm. The stalwart islanders had borne him without jar. She bent above him with a young coconut and set it to his lips. He sipped at it of his own volition with closed eyes that he presently opened. Her heart leaped. Their desperate straits were forgotten. Her lover knew her.

"Kalani!"

Above them the heavy clouds rolled on and the ashes sifted down in the almost unbearable heat; but she knew nothing save that her lover had come back from the verge of the uttermost darkness. Now she would keep him here.

It was that problem that brought her back to the present.

Upolu might survive the night. There was food enough to nourish him, and she vowed fiercely to herself that none should stand between it and Upolu. But what of tomorrow, the sun's eye in the pit dessicating, sucking out the life of even the stoutest among them?

They could hold the place. The sharp side-ridges protected themselves and the cross-ridge could be defended, even against the spit-fire, so steep was the pitch of its final ascent. But the strangers would guard the pool below after the fire died down. They would kill any one who tried to carry water. They were trapped. But there must be some way out. Some way.

She looked at the warriors squatting in the heat. The clouds of smoke precluded shadows and there was little choice of place. The sweat beaded and runneled all of them; their jaws were agape and their tongues already lolling. Their eyes lacked everything save direction. And all were turned upon Kalani. She had led them into this. Now what?

Kalani singled out the man who had gabbled the night before when Taku had broken into the talk, clad in his wizard's garb—Toluku the ancient. His red eyes blinked at her and his jaw wagged. But there seemed something of purpose in the attitude and Kalani plucked at the straw of comfort.

"What is it, Toluku?" she asked. "Have you counsel?"

She saw that his lips were gummy and passed him the rest of the liquor, in the coconut she had used for Upolu. He swallowed gratefully.

"O Heaven-Born," he began, "I am an old man and I have seen and heard many

things. Many of these have I forgotten but there are some that stay fresh in this old head of mine, as the green shoot of a coconut holds life within the withering husk. Let me gaze upon the war-cloth, Heaven-Born, that the sight of it may quicken my memory."

The war-cloth had been Kalani's burden in the climb, that and some pigeons for Upolu. Wonderingly she produced it.

"The stars," he croaked in his old-man pipe—

"The stars are the eyes of the gods,
The gods of the *Merikani*.

"And the stripes—

"Red as the blood of a man,
The blood-red bands of friendship.

"Good words! Brave words! Now it is in my mind——"

And then his mind lapsed and he squatted, poking at the black dust.

"What is in thy mind, Toluku?" asked Kalani coaxingly.

"The gods of the *Merikani*," he answered. "Now there are many gods. I have seen many. There is one on the cliff. He failed us but perhaps he answers Taku. I do not know. But gods must be spoken to and one must know how to address them. I, Toluku, know that. There are some who want blood, hot blood, running in the groove of the stone. Others— *Eyah*, I have forgotten!"

Kalani was very patient. This might be the babble of an imbecile but she still fancied there was something back of it.

"The gods of the *Merikani*," she prompted. A feeble ray came back to the old eyes.

"Aye, they must be good gods. Have we not heard their deeds? What is it you sing, Kalani? For truly there is something stirring in this old brain of mine as a child stirs in the womb."

Kalani's own throat was parched but she began to sing softly, the flag on her knees, and the tribe craned their necks to listen.

"Ever beneath this cloth;
Whether they dwell in peace;
Whether they go to war;
Under the eyes of their gods;
Bound by the blood-red bands;
Freedom and Justice thrive
Dealt by the brave *Merikani*.

"An open hand for the poor;
A listening ear for the slave;
A blow for the wicked man;
Yet mercy for the wrongdoer.

"Wherever these stars shall shine;
Wherever these bars shall wave;
There the oppressor hides
From the vengeful eyes of the gods,
From the gods of the good *Merikani*;
From the stripes that shall start on his back
And teach him the lesson of wisdom."

There was a brief silence. But back into the hearts of the beleaguered tribe, sitting under the dense clouds that were still drifting against the peaks and filling the fissures, drifting through the high gorges, came a strange comfort as they gazed upon their fetish. Toluku broke the gap.

"Strong words! Surely the *Merikani* know how to speak to their gods! Are they not our friends, bound by the blood-red bands? Would they not speak for us that their gods may smite the oppressor? Surely their gods would listen when they knew that these strangers had spit upon the cloth and defiled it, had torn the band of friendship? If we could speak to the *Merikani*——"

His voice trailed off. A warrior broke in.

"If, you babbling fool? How can we speak to them?"

But Kalani silenced him with a gesture.

"It was long ago," went on Toluku. "Is there more drink in that nut? I was strong then and a headman. *Eyah*, comely I was like a straight palm that laughs at the gale! A canoe came to Talofah on the drift. There were four men in it. Two we killed, I and another, whose name I have forgotten. Two we saved and took for slaves, as was our right.

"And this slave of mine, after a feast-day, told me of a land that lay under the rising moon where he said dwelt people who called themselves *Merikani* and who had such a flag. Two long days' paddle it was, with wind to aid. I thought he lied to find favor with me, but now it is borne in upon me that he spoke the truth though I silenced him for one whose mouth was twisted.

"I had been kind to him; later, when certain black women came in another canoe and one of them fell to me, I gave her to him for wife. So I think he told the truth. He told me the stars by which to sail—but those— 'The stars are the eyes of the gods,' he maundered.



TO KALANI he spoke sooth. The mention of the stars strengthened it. It did not seem like idle boasting of the slave. Toluku had been good to him. She seized a stick and began to draw in the dust. Like all chiefs she had a working knowledge of the heavens. Taku knew them and Upolu also. She knew how to set up a pointer of angled sticks in the prow of a canoe and steer by it for so many hours at such a pace, and then change it to another angling.

"See, Toluku," she said. "Here is the rising moon. Of what time of the year did this slave speak?"

She reached out and took up a calabash of pigeon-broth. It was cold but strong and she gave it to Toluku. The juice warmed his old stomach and he edged up to her.

"It was the Month of Seals," he said. "Aye, I remember that, for he said they had caught one asleep, tired with the long trip from the North."

He chuckled as the broth spurred him. Kalani rapidly sketched in the constellations that swung upward in the east during the Month of Seals.

"Now show me," she asked anxiously.

"Without hesitation he pointed out a fixed star.

"That is it," he said. "It should be a red star, red as the ripe fruit of the *hala*."

Kalani clapped her hands softly. Upolu moved and murmured. She went to him and gave him some more drink. Then she went away from the rest, carrying the flag, and sat down with closed eyes.

The tribe sat, with the sweat pouring off them, motionless. Their pulses beat out the minutes. The fickle sea-wind had fallen. The trade began to back up the smoke as it rushed through the high gorges. The sun broke through, making the crater a bowl, half glare, half muggy shade.

Kalani rose, adjusted the awning above her lover and came over to her people.

"I will make a bargain with you," she said. "Know that I do this thing for love of you all and for especial love of Upolu, for so is woman, that one man must urge her soul. We can not leave here while the strangers stay. They may kill us; they may make us slaves. Rather than be a slave I would gladly die. But, much as my heart shrinks to leave Upolu, yet do I think that this slave of Toluku spoke sooth. I am your chief; I am the guardian of this

cloth. It is for me to make the attempt.

"Beyond the cliffs—" she pointed windward—"is the Bay of Lingerin Death. There I can find the canoe I dare not seek elsewhere because of Taku and the strangers. There I can get nuts, perhaps some food."

Many of the listeners shuddered. Though many islands call the dread disease, the lingering death of leprosy, the "*mai pake*"—the Chinese sickness—yet in all the groups it makes its appearance, perhaps from some fault in over starchy food amongst certain levels of the population.

In large communities a separate island is set aside for the unfortunates; on Talofah a tiny inlet on the windward side was their portion. They were forbidden under the death-tabu to leave it. They had their canoes for the fishing; they had little plots of soil where they raised their *taro* and, tucked away in certain nooks, breadfruit and bananas and coco-palms managed to bear.

Kalani meant to take a canoe from these refugees, to secure certain food if it proved to be uncontaminated, such as fresh-netted fish, not handled, and fruit from the sparse groves. But the journey through the flinty passes and then down the dreadful heights was one hardly to be thought of. However, it might be done.

"Now, if I do this thing," she went on, "and I can do it, for my spirit is strong within me and tells me I shall win to this land where the *Merikani* are lodged, set this against my effort:

"Swear to sustain my love, Upolu, even if your tongues swell from lack of water. Swear, kneeling with your brows upon this sacred cloth, that you will give him his full need of food and of drink from the nuts we have brought. There is enough to nourish life for all of you, with some daring, for five days and nights.

"You will suffer, yet will I be suffering too, seeking my way to this land. You may have to steal down for water in the dark and dare the spit-fires of the strangers. You may hear your little children whimper and see the tongues of your women choke their mouths. Yet I shall suffer, and for your sake. This is a bargain between us.

"If by the fifth night I am not returned let Upolu die, for his spirit will then seek mine that will be in the uttermost darkness and yet shall show some signal to my love. I will take with me the flag. I must start now for there is no time to spare, and before

the smoke is all blown back, I will use it as a screen between me and our enemies. Hold your spirits strong and pile rocks to roll down upon them if they venture to the attack. I will do my part. I have spoken. Now answer."

They looked upon her and saw her face radiant with resolve. They looked on the flag, the fetish of the tribe of Talofah, and some errant wind stirred it so that the blood-red bands of friendship waved and rippled and the stars moved on the blue field. It was a token.

Solemnly, by tribal precedence, they advanced and knelt beside it where it lay upon the cindery dust, bowing their heads until they touched the bunting while Kalani, her eyes upcast, stood like a seeress invoking victory from defeat. Then they set aside a goodly portion of the food and swore to dedicate it to Upolu's welfare, come thirst, come hunger, come death.

"It is well," said Kalani. "One thing more. For Vaega's service in warning us of the fire, I release the tabu upon her. And now I go."

She rolled the sacred flag and girdled it about her. She kissed the forehead of Upolu and, as he stirred, saluted his fevered lips.

"I go, my love," she whispered. "Rest and grow strong until I come again."

She slipped the bag of pearls about his neck.

She advanced to the upper end of the crater and picked out her perilous path. A vagrant roll of smoke swept down and enveloped her as she started upward. She emerged from it to dart into a rift up which she sidled, lost to the assembly that stood across the pit to watch her progress.

Far up she clambered, hanging at times by her hands while she sought foothold, but ever progressing until she reached her first objective, a cleft between fantastic spires of rock. Once she waved her hand, free from the smoke. Then a cloud of it puffed out, and when it cleared Kalani had vanished into the heart of the windward cliffs.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BAY OF LINGERING DEATH

ON WINDWARD Talofah the cliffs rise almost as sheer as the walls of a Gothic cathedral, buttressed, niched, fretted out of stone. As sheer, but infinitely higher, from

where the surf beat thundering at their bases to where jagged spines and spires, turrets and riven domes and minarets gave to Talofah, heyn by the sea, and wind, the fantasy of a goblin's castle.

Closer acquaintance found the sheer walls marked with perilous crossings, set with crevices, with certain spaces smooth-polished as the palm of the hand and others rough with the rasp of pumice, lava, basalt, and obsidian, the upthrust of the eruption that had lifted the island far above sea level.

As these great masses had come up some had split asunder, leaving deep rifts that the weather had slowly widened, gorges from a hundred to a thousand feet deep and very narrow, horrible places of death and darkness and damp that even the birds avoided.

For the most part the deep sea came clear to the shore and the steep escarpments went plunging down to a hundred, two hundred fathoms. But here and there a jutting, underwater shelf had formed the platform for a little beach; and the widening mouth of one vast fissure, running back at an angle from the sea, backed such a cove and supplied shelter for soil to accumulate and green things to grow.

Week after week, month after month, there was no sea egress from this place, no chance to launch a canoe against the frightful surges. When a day of peace came, when the winds were asleep or blowing from the opposite quarter in the monsoon, the wretched inhabitants sent out their little flotilla to fish and gratefully dried the catch, after one glorious feast of the fresh flesh. At other times they contented themselves with shellfish and the small fry of the few pools.

They never adventured far from the bay. To be caught anywhere but close to their appointed base meant death from the rest of the tribe, inexorable, as the maimed fish is destroyed by the school, and these poor creatures, doomed, rotting, clung to life as strongly as the most fortunate and healthy of the Talofans of the tribe to which they, the people of the Bay of Lingering Death, no longer belonged.

They had their loves, their devotions and sacrifices, their certain happinesses. Though their ravaged bodies lost the semblance of humanity yet they had many human attributes.

As they were tabu, so was their place. None but Kalani, and even she only in such a time of stress, would have dared to venture among them. But a canoe was vital to her quest and, also, it must be a small one. The only others of the requisite size were beached by the Summer palace, if they had not been burned.

What food she was to carry must be obtained from the little Bay of Lingerin Death; she could not carry it down the cliffs, even had there been any food to spare. The descent was one not only of infinite peril but frightful fatigue. The flag that she carried flat-girdled about her loins was a serious handicap.

She had but two hours of daylight left when she won the up-climb from the crater and worked her way between two peaks to a view of the windward sea. Her hands and fingers were bruised, torn and bleeding. So were her feet. So her knees and elbows.

She had advanced by slow and painful processes, shifting from crack to knob, sidling across the slanting faces of precipices where the least slip would send her down to broken limbs and, later, lingering, lonely death.

Sometimes she pulled herself up by the sheer strength of her young muscles, sometimes she made a traverse, lizard-wise, when only her swiftness saved her. But she won through at last, wriggling up a chimney of rough rock to drop temporarily exhausted, with the worst of her journey yet ahead of her.

It was imperative for her to secure the canoe before darkness. With great gasps of relief she saw that the sea held comparatively calm but, once dark, she would not be able to judge her launching and that meant long hours wasted. As she rested she made her stellar calculations. The Month of Seals had gone by before two moons but she knew the shift of the constellations and planned the course she must take across the unknown sea in search of an unknown land.

In the matter of leeway she must trust her own sea-sense. Her courage burned high and clear as she gathered herself together for the descent. Had it not been close to the monsoon shift, with occasional lapses in the steady winds until the supremacy was established, she would never have been able to get down those awful walls with the gale tearing at her precarious holds.

There was no suggestion of a path; she merely knew her objective, the beach and the general positions of the peaks.

She chose her first landing, an inch or two of projection where the harder strata stood out, and made it. Then down a diagonal crack, foot by foot, hand over hand, often without foothold. Twice she had to chance a leap across a rift and once she hung there spreadeagled on the obtuse incline, barely daring to make her next move.

The folds of the flag caught on a spiky spur of lava and she slipped; but the bunting held, while she clutched with one hand at where she had tucked it into her own girdle, the fingers of her other hand asprawl on the inhospitable obsidian.

As she swung over the abyss her foot found a precarious hold and, limpeted, she fought against the dizziness that suddenly swept over her. It seemed as if her will alone clamped her there until the moment passed and once more she essayed the passage.

But she could not always choose her way, and at last a place where molten lava had bubbled out of the seams of the cliff and hardened to a petrified cascade forced her aside from her traverse. Down the steep decline of often sharp-edged waves she went, leaving red traces from foot and hand, to come out upon a narrow terrace fifty feet above the sea where the surf seethed about snags of rock, the tops of submerged pinnacles.

Half-way, another freak of the formation jutted out between her and the water, breaking a slippery incline of polished flint. Talofah had had, like all other volcanic islands, its periods of submergence, and once this portion had been opposed to the steady swash of waves that had hydraulically smoothed it to a glassy surface.

Kalani was almost done. The Bay of Lingerin Death was well off to her left. She could see a tiny canoe far from land, off the entrance to the place. Every muscle had been overstrained and every tendon wrenched, it seemed, and all her weary body cried out for rest, for an ending. Only the flame of her spirit, fed by her love for Upolu and her tribe, burned unfalteringly.

There was no vine growing on these windy slopes; there was neither seam nor crevice to aid her. Twenty feet to her right and less than that to her left, the terrace disappeared. The sun was swiftly dropping.

Along the windward coast it was all shadow, deepening swiftly. Soon twilight would come, short-lingering, and then the sudden dark.

Kalani stood up on the narrow jut, leaning back against the face of the cliff. She took off her girdle and the flag and rolled both into a compact bundle to hold in her arms. Then she sat down on the lip of the crag and gradually straightened. With fearfully increasing speed she slid off the ledge, the hard rock burning against her shoulder blades, holding her body arrow-straight, waiting for the first impact of her heels upon the lower outthrust.

That was all she had to guide her. It came, and simultaneously she crouched and sprang, far out, trying to guide her darting body to avoid the foam-edged fangs that seemed to gnash at her as the waves rose and fell.

Fair between two of them she shot into the sea in a head-dive, her arms wrapped about her precious burden. Deep, deep, she plunged and then shot up again, one arm free now, cleaving the waves, neck up, head alert, striking out for a landing at the Bay of Lingering Death. The fisher in his lone canoe was coming in and saw her judging the surges, landing and deftly curving her body to offset the underdrag.



HE followed her in, shooting the crest of a billow as she adjusted her kirtle and, carrying the flag, ran up the beach.

It was almost dark now. The lepers had cooked their evening meal and were inside their shelters, coming out at her hail.

"It is I, Kalani. Come out—and swiftly!"

Wondering they came, keeping their distance, making obeisance, for the late-comers to the retreat recognized her. She turned to the fisher and bade him drag his canoe above the wave-reach but to leave its contents undisturbed, asking him one quick question—if the fish were netted, or hooked.

The catch was netted. They had not been taken from the meshes. Not handled. Kalani accepted what risk there was in the net, soaked in the sea water. So also would she let them gather coconuts for her, to husk later. She gave swift orders to the creatures that prostrated themselves to the heaven-born, asking no questions as to her will. Their hideousness had blended with the dusk; only the harsh voices of some of

them proclaimed their difference from other men and women.

With her own hand Kalani loaded the little canoe with nuts and fish. These would sustain life. Leprosy is not readily contagious; the canoe and its paddles, constantly soaked with brine, held no danger. The light began to fail swiftly and the eastern sky was flaming with the after-glow. The moon and her guiding stars would not be visible for two hours or more.

She judged her incoming wave, enormous, a gray-green monster looming in the dusk, and shoved off in its backflow, almost waist-deep for a moment, then with a dexterous down-kick went over its low gunwale to grasp a paddle and ply it furiously against the next high-rising billow. Over the crest she went, the uncouth multitude watching her half-dazed, and beat her way out to the open sea.

CHAPTER XIV

AT THE SPRING

TAKU was ill at ease. Things were not working out as he had hoped. He had confidently expected to be able to master the secret of the white man's magic spit-fires. His knowledge of chemical combinations was practically nil and he had held the idea that this mastery of fire was the result of certain conjurings, aided perhaps by incantations, along lines of magic similar to his own, something that he could by cunning learn or steal.

He saw the cartridges slipped into clips and breech without realization of their part in dealing death. The guns he was not allowed to touch. The nearest he came to it was when Weissman grimly showed him his automatic and stated flatly that if Taku failed in the smallest detail to obey his orders or showed anything that might be construed as treachery to the whites, he might expect instant consignment to the "uttermost darkness."

And with all of this he had to save his face with his fellows. He had betrayed them into bondage and he, Taku, was only a driver of slaves without a headman's privilege, his magic scoffed at by these masterful strangers. Under the guns of Weissman and his fellows Taku's followers had been set to work getting rid of the dead that had washed ashore from the shallows

where the sharks had not been able to reach them.

And then a long series of laborious tasks was ahead of them—to procure daily food and pile up stores for later consumption, to fell trees or haul in fallen trunks that had become fairly seasoned, to manufacture fathoms of sennit cordage and weave close mats for sails.

There was one gleam of relief in the situation. It was evident that the strangers were getting ready to depart. But in the mean time Taku was losing his ancient prestige and it took all his cleverness even to make a showing to his followers that he was acquiescing in all this forced labor along an organized plan that would yet outwit the whites.

Weissman maintained an iron discipline. Two men were assigned to the ridges to watch the crater lips and command the pool. He had no idea of Kalani's journey, thanks to the smoke that had screened her departure and the heat of the burned valley that had prevented any close watchfulness until it cooled off.

Satisfied from his quizzing of Taku that Kalani and the main tribe were safely corralled in a cindery trap where thirst and starvation would save cartridges, he let the matter of the pearls rest. If Kalani was going to be worn to a skeleton, even to a corpse, before he could conquer her, that did not greatly matter, he philosophized.

He would have liked to beat down her spirit, to master her in crude sensuality; but that part of Weissman's make-up was always subservient to his bigger ambitions. With Kalani's death from starvation would occur that of the other women and as a matter of discipline he figured it would be better not to carry any of them off. The pearls would keep.

He enjoyed himself as dictator and he knew what to do. He realized that he could not make much of a ship but it would not take a very large craft to carry him, his men, such natives as they might press for sailors, and plentiful provisions. The nails in the smashed whale-boat would suffice for his lower strakes and above that he would resort to joinery and good calking, combined with hardwood pegs.

Once at sea, Weissman trusted to luck, rather glorying in the adventure, to bring them a better vessel and then a still larger. Such things had been done before by deter-

mined men. The stars would have to serve for navigation until he could touch or sight land that could be identified with his charts or commandeer a compass and chronometers.

Weissman did not intend to remain upon Talofah at the expense of diminishing cartridges, and he realized that Taku was restive and only perpetual vigilance would keep him and his men in subjection. At the last, with the boat finished, if they showed symptoms of revolt he could order a general massacre. He had to keep his own men busy also. The thought of women in the crater held them uneasy and there were tentative suggestions to rush the stronghold before these women died.

But Weissman's was the inflexible, the dominant will, strong with the desire to win out of their present misfortunes and emulate the survivors of the *Emden*. He alone of his party knew about the pearls and he intended to keep this a secret.

Brainier as well as more forceful than the rest, Weissman shrewdly figured that the Fatherland's day in the South Pacific was over, temporarily at least. And there was always the chance that some vessel of the Allies might discover Talofah.

Weissman had no idea of being caught napping. He longed to get back in touch with Germany, to arrive heroically, to gain prestige, decorations, command, and a share in the final frightfulness that would overwhelm the rest of the world and reduce it to vassalage.

Then, with the pearls, he, *ober-leutnant* no longer by virtue of his deeds, but given a majority, would swagger with the conquerors and play the overlord.

There was another thing he wanted besides the pearls, more than the pearls, and that was the accursed flag of the accursed Americans. The thought of its rescue by Upolu and his own accompanying humiliation grated on him perpetually. It was as a red cloak to a bull.

But that too could wait, he decided, grinning as he thought of Upolu and Kalani with their faithful followers, with their women and the little children, broiling in the crater, all the moisture sucked out of their bodies by the cruel sun, faint from want of food, penned in from plenty.

"Let them stew in their caldron," he said to his men. "Here we are, a handful, holding the whole island. There is no way to

rush that place while they are alive and strong enough to move stones. When they are mummies we'll go up and get that cursed flag and put to sea. No use to risk our lives or waste our bullets."

He watched them narrowly as he spoke. Their last adventure on the water was not of the sort to make another sea-trip loom up as a pleasure voyage. And this was a land of ease and plenty. Here were slaves and women, brown of skin but comely, fruits and flesh and strong liquors, a perfect climate, all the flesh-pots. No more duty, but a lolling equality.

"The rains will be here before long," argued Weissman. "Nights and days of downpour when the whole place steams and everything molders. No sun, no fruits save coconuts and sodden yams. Days and nights of everlasting wetness and gloom until you will ache to cut each other's throats for excitement. The land a bog and the sea shut out with mist."

He held them for the while but they talked apart and he knew the question of the women would come up again on the morrow. One of the sentries reported that, by driving timbers into certain crevices a way could be made up a cliff that would command the crater.

"We could kill off enough of the men to make the rest surrender," he said. "It can be done."

"And what will they be doing while we are driving timbers, pighead?" asked Weissman.

"We could make a shield of wood, couldn't we?" challenged the other sullenly while his fellows nodded.

"Try it," scoffed Weissman. "You saw what the rocks did to the shelters. There are not enough of us to tackle such a job. There are other women in the world. Besides, how do you know that you could reach a point that would cover all the crater? You talk like a fool!"

He silenced the man with the savage scorn he put into his words but he resolved to watch him carefully. He had called him pighead but he had brains. Let him suspect that and he might start an initiative. His plan was not improbable.



THAT night, the second after Kalani had left, a diversion came. The day had been one of torment. Upolu had been religiously tended and fed and showed some signs of improvement. His

pure blood had resisted the infection and, with returning strength, now drove it back. But the rest were in sorry case.

The children whimpered for water until their lips gummed and their voices choked in dry throats. Even in the shadow the heat drew out the liquid of their bodies until perspiration ceased and all their membranes burned. The tribe lay in apathy, waiting for the night that would bring some relief. But with the next day death would surely begin to take toll.

There was a little food left, aside from that set aside for Upolu. Hunger they could stand but not the lack of water, not the dumb mouths and dim, imploring eyes of the children. The thought of the deep, pure pool at the base of the cliff added to the torture.

The fire had died to ashes and much of the ash had been carried off by the winds. The everlasting springs would have made the pool clear again, clear and bubbling and cold. The vision and remembrance of it was keen to all of them save Upolu, still wandering in the outer mazes of delirium.

As twilight fell they held consultation.

"Since we must die," said an elder, "surely it is better to die swiftly than in this fashion. Let us try to bring water and try before we grow too weak to climb. Those who go must surely be fortunate. If they die it is a quick death and perhaps they, at least, will clear their throats before they go out into the darkness. I, who am old, so that I have no more speed than a turtle, would gladly go. And in this fashion.

"We will place many nuts and calabashes in a net, binding them so they will keep upright. These we can lower softly before the moon rises. The young men can climb down in the dusk and fill them. Thus they can use all their limbs for speed and safety. Shall we draw lots?"

Hope galvanized them into action and all through the afternoon the women worked with the poor materials at hand making a net to hold the water containers. Between the depth of dusk and the rising of the moon was only a short time. This period would increase as the nights went on and the risk of discovery would diminish, but now the need was imminent. Another day and the passage down the cliff would be too hard a task for their devitalized bodies.

The afterglow flamed and faded and the moted twilight swept upward from the sea.

The topmost peak held fire from the down-curving sun, a finger-tip of blood. Then it grayed and the stars leaped to their posts upon the ramparts of the night. With infinite caution the net of water-bowls slid downward and three youths, flattened against the cliff, their bodies naked, crept in a perilous descent, while above the tribe waited with swollen tongues that had already begun to protrude from between cracked and blackened lips.

The three reached the pool and crouched, gazing, now at the ridges where they knew the watchers were ready to spit fire, now at the pool, still scummy with light ash but largely cleared. They cupped up the cool water with their palms and felt life growing within them as their tissues swelled and the weary blood responded to the stimulus.

The net was long in coming and they strained their gaze upward, not daring even to whisper, impatient, dreading the rising of the moon. The meshes seemed to have caught on something though they could barely distinguish where the net swung against the cliff.

Weissman had visited the right-hand ridge on the relief watch to look at the place where his man had declared a crude ladder could be made to a ledge well above the crater. He saw that this was practical though he did not mention it.

"They'll be crazy for water tonight," he said. "Keep a close watch on the pool. They may try to get down to it. Any signs of them today?"

"No," said the man who had been on guard.

"H'm! Leave me your rifle. I think I'll stay here with Emil for a while. The moon rises half an hour after sunset. If they try for water we must teach them a lesson."

At the pool the three were now certain that the net had been obstructed. They could see it move a little way upward, a dim blur, and then descend, only to be rearrested. Every moment added to their risk. From the ridge the pool showed in the dark like a breath-dimmed mirror, but with the first light of the full moon up the devastated valley it would become a brilliant surface, and on its rock-rimmed margin every movement of theirs would be plainly visible. Still the net hung to where some spur of rock or outthrust bough had thwarted its merciful errand.

There was a chance for them to save

themselves by a swift return but none thought of it. Savages the outer world judged them, but they were human. The thought of suffering women and children held them. Better to face death than the shame of coming back alive but empty-handed.

The moon would disclose the net and its burden, but if it could be freed and they could fill the containers before the spitting fires reached them, the odds were that the precious water could be safely hauled back to the crater. Once again they stooped in the dark and scooped up what might be their last drink.

The net was coming down again, down to a hundred, to fifty, to twenty feet above them. They rose and stretched out their hands toward it. Then the sky on the eastern sea-rim shuddered, silvered and the traitorous disk of the moon, shining like a great pearl, rolled up, sending, its light straight through the funnel of the burned-out valley, silhouetting the upreaching figures as they clutched the net and carefully lowered it to the pool level, one holding it while his comrades dipped out the water.

A red spark from the left-hand ridge, two from the right, a crash of high-powered discharge in the narrowed space, and one man slumped into the pool.

Again and again the rifles barked and a second man leaped high, caught at the net in his death-agony, and sent it spinning. But they had worked fast and most of the bowls were filled. The third man dropped to his knees, shot through the stomach.

Slowly he wilted to his buttocks, the pitiless moon showing the gray anguish on his face fighting against his will while with the last remnants of his strength he managed to swing the heavy net out from the base of the cliff and shout to those above to draw it up. As it began to move he toppled slowly sidewise and lay twitching on the rocks, the dark blood oozing from his wound.

Weissman was swift to surmise the plan of relief.

"Fire at the bundle," he cried. "Send all the bullets you can through those calabashes they've got there. After this we'll keep a fire going down there before moon-rise."

He was enraged at the clever strategy

but he took careful aim. The sentry on the opposite ridge caught the idea of what they were doing and joined the fusillade. Little spurts of water began to attest the accuracy of the shooting and the net bounced and swung as it was hauled up with strenuous speed. The men at the rope were protected behind a natural embattlement of rocks and Weissman cursed at his inability to reach them with his bullets.

But he could see plainly the dark line of the rope against the gray lava, illumined by the moon, and he left the perforating of the containers to his men while he strove to clip the strands where they showed close to the notch through which the net had been lowered. He was an excellent marksman and he had the range to a nicety, but it was not an easy target.

Leaking but still bearing a good measure of the precious fluid, the net neared the crater. Weissman fired the last bullet from his own rifle and snatched that of the man beside him, ordering him to reload. He was lying flat along the ridge, his gun-barrel resting on a jut of rock, his sights carefully aligned on the black thread.

It seemed impossible for him to miss, yet some providence surely protected that line of life. Coolly he inspected the sights to be certain that the other's estimate of the range agreed with his. His hands were steady as he cuddled the butt to his cheek and squeezed the trigger. There were hardly a dozen feet of the rope to take up.

He fired and the net seemed to drop. He had clipped the strands. He yelled out a triumphing oath at his success and then cursed again as the twisted sennit held and once more the net neared the notch. In that strong, tropic moonlight he could see that the rope was now divided. So was his target halved.

Swiftly he aimed and fired again; but now eager arms were reaching down regardless of exposure. They clutched the meshes, three pairs of them, the head and shoulders of one man protruding.

Weissman's rifle cracked and the bullet smashed into the base of the neck of the most reckless. The figure somersaulted with fingers intertwined in the net while Weissman grinned at the jerk that was coming, and fired again at the arms that strove to offset the shock. Once more his magazine emptied and this time his fellow's was also empty.

The whirling figure straightened out but there was still life, still will and reason in the dying body. The knees drew up and the naked feet clung to the face of the rock, relieving something of the strain. The stiffening fingers straightened and, last duty done, the corpse went slithering down the cliff and thudded on the stone margin of the pool.

The net, with many gallons saved, vanished through the notch.

The man shot through the stomach still writhed on the rocks.

"We'll put a few questions to him," said Weissman. "And we'll chuck the rest of that carrion into the pool. They won't be so anxious to get at that water after a little while. Where is the best place to get down from here?"

The stricken Talofan was almost spent when they reached him. For a moment his retreating spirit seemed to come deliberately to glare defiance at the strangers.

"They have got the water," he gasped. "And soon Kalani will return with the *Merikani*. I shall be—dead—but my spirit will watch while they kill—kill!"

His eyes glazed and then the film vanished as he gazed up into the glittering sky.

"The stars—the eyes—of the gods,
The gods—of the good—*Merikanil*

He raised himself on one elbow and pointed spasmodically upward.

"They are coming. Kalani brings them! *Eyah!* They come!"

Perturbed, raging, Weissman strove to shake some life into the Talofan. But the jaws had sagged and the body was limp in his clutch.

What the devil did he mean about Kalani returning with the *Merikani*? Had she given them the slip somehow? Was there an American settlement that she could reach?

The man with him dragged him aside. A great rock had been sped from the crater. It slumped into the pool with the gush of a geyser, spraying them. Another shattered on the rocks, a fragment cutting Weissman's cheek. Retreating, he looked in vain for something to fire at. No sign of the defense was visible but over the verge the rocks came rushing down, splitting and bounding or plumping in the pool where the dead man seemed to dance in the turbulent waters.

CHAPTER XV

THE STORM

BACK in camp, Weissman summoned Taku and cross-examined him. But he could get little satisfaction out of the wizard. For all Taku's habit of keeping his ears open he had not heard of the talk of the ancient's slave. As for Kalani having disappeared, he was frankly skeptical.

"How could she have got out of the crater?" he asked. "Not by the cliffs."

"There is no path?" demanded Weissman suspiciously, his eyes boring into Taku.

There was no doubt as to the sincerity of the wizard's reply. He could not conceive the miracles that might be wrought by a woman's love.

"Then it is only the babble of a dying man," said Weissman.

But he was not convinced. There had been a ring of truth in the Talofan's last words. The sentry too had believed them and Weissman knew that his men were infected. In his own heart there quickened the beginning of a panic. He sat brooding far into the night and came to a decision.

They would repair the whale-boat, furnish it with a mast and sails and leave Talofah. But first he would build that crude ladder up the face of the cliff and sweep the crater with a withering fire before they stormed it and got the pearls. The pearls and the flag! He would let the men think he was acceding to their wishes. They could not take any women away in the whale-boat, but if they wanted an orgy before they left he could accede to that.

Two things disturbed him. Taku might spread the news of Kalani's escape for his own ends even if he did not credit its accomplishment. And if Kalani had gone she might have taken the pearls with her. These two "mights" kept him from sleep. Action was the only thing to knit the disturbing elements.

He planned to stir up Taku's ambition. At a pinch he could win the wizard by leaving him a rifle and some cartridges and showing him how to use them. That would be a bribe Taku could not resist. It would make him once more an undoubted leader with his following and urge that faction to the extermination of the rest.

He had noted the crevices in the precipice and figured how he could work a way up

the escarpment without much risk from falling rocks. They could build some sort of pavesade, a wooden shield to shelter them on the first stages of the ascent.

Rifle-fire could enflame the defenders of the crater while Taku's force scaled the height from the pool. It could be done in twenty-four hours and then he would have to end his men's ambitions for a debauch as speedily as possible.

Taku and his men would have something to say to that. Weissman was certain that they would not lightly submit to the possession of the women of the tribe. They were all bachelors. Their protest might force the strangers to a swift escape from a common danger.

Weissman decided to risk that. They could get clear if they stayed together. Their rifles would efficiently cover a launching. Taku must not be given his rifle until the last, not at all if it could be prevented.

He knew that Taku was anxious to see them go. So they would first mend the whale-boat and provision and equip it. Then the storming, with a bright lookout to seaward, in case Kalani had managed to get away and bring rescue.

The night had darkened while he meditated and Weissman, unmindful of time, thought it was the sinking of the moon that had caused this. But, rousing from his reverie with his plan of action determined, he saw that the moon was still well above the crests though only sickly gleams from it pierced a rapidly augmenting panoply of scudding clouds.

Monsoon changes are uncertain. The northeast trades, knowing their reign about to end, resent any eagerness of the southwest winds to encroach upon their regular season. And the issue of such a challenge is swift and stormy.

Bank upon bank of vapor formed in whirling masses, the stars entirely shrouded, the moon soon vanishing. A low moan swept over the island and there was a sudden bowing of all the palms though Weissman felt no breath of wind. Then was silence save from the reef. In the camp he seemed the only one awake.

Seaward the breakers were ghostly on the barrier, mounting high in a gray luminosity, their drum-roll increasing to a roar behind which sounded the deeper diapason of a rising sea. Still there was no wind. His breath came laboringly. It was as if the

air had been sucked away, leaving a semi-vacuum.

It grew darker. The line of surf on the beach, the pallid breakers on the reef, were the only things visible. The island had melted in the blackness that seemed to have sifted down from the clouds. He knew that back of him the forests mounted to the peaks but he could see nothing.

Once more the moaning sounded like the voice that comes from the inner chambers of a shell, enormously magnified. This time it appeared to come from the sea. Again the trees bowed in the blackness with one long swishing that ceased abruptly, and still he could feel no wind. But he was dimly conscious of the sleepers all about him stirring uneasily in their sleep. It was eerie.

Weissman felt inexpressibly puny, as might a pigmy who comes suddenly across an impending battle of giants. He had an impression of the sky lowering like the ceiling of some prison chamber that closes down upon its victim. Pulses began to beat in his brain and a depression both mental and bodily gripped him. A diver in eighteen fathoms, a sandhog in an air-lock, would have shared the sensation.

Suddenly the inverted abyss of sky above him was cleft by a frightful flare of lightning. Weissman saw the high peaks, every buttress and fissure glaring in a flickering blue flame, the forests livid, the men rising all about him from sleep, their eyeballs prominent, white-circled. He saw enormous waves topping the reef. Over all the blue-lavender fire of high voltage running wild, hellish, menacing.

It was gone. The maw of the night swallowed up everything but the phosphorescent, foaming waves. Ten pounding heartbeats and then a crash as if the solid firmament had fallen, rending, grinding, horrible. Men were clutching at him in the dark. And still no wind and, out of the void, the awful howling of the sea.

Weissman rallied his wits.

"The boat!" he cried. "In the next flash. Save the boat!"

It was drawn well beyond high tide but he knew that the lagoon would soon be sending its flood waters far beyond normal. Again showed that blinding gash amid the rolling masses of cloud and Weissman darted down the beach, three of his men following him. The lagoon was a surging maelstrom backed by a wall of water like a tidal bore.

They grasped the boat and dragged it up the slightly sloping beach with superhuman force.

The lightning flickered out and still they tugged. The thunder seemed to break only a few feet above their heads. The pressure of it was distinct, and hard upon it came flash after flash. Fiery serpents writhed across the turmoil of the heavens.

Weissman saw Taku standing in a ring of prostrate islanders and then the wizard collapsed. Peel followed peel, between them the crash of the seas. The water was licking up the beach. And now the lowering of the sky was unmistakable. The peaks were swathed with clouds, low-bellied, dun leviathans.

Then, as if the lightning streaks were smiting similars, the clouds were rent and the rain dropped, dropped with the force of solid masses of water, beating them down to the earth. The hiss of it, the smash of the waves, the hideous clamor of the thunder, blent in a pandemonium that stunned sense and instinct, leaving them cowering at the mercy of the storm.

Soon they were ankle-deep in running water, pouring from the cliffs. The cascade had swelled to a mighty cataract that tore out of the sand a bed for the new-born river that rushed to meet the encroaching waves. The boat was forgotten. Weissman had found all his men and shouted his orders to get their rifles and ammunition and then they were back to the cliffs, the strength pulped out of them.

Swiftly as it had come, the rain ceased. The mighty reservoirs had emptied their tons upon tons of water and there came another pause. So might a demon orchestra rest for a bar or so before the next soul-rending movement. The lightning was intermittent, the thunder more distant; but the storm had given only its prelude.

The wind seemed to swoop down from the heights and rush in from the sea simultaneously. Waves ignored the reef and came riding up to their feet. Weissman saw the boat retreating in the back-tow, tossed up, swallowed. Like rats in a flooding cistern they essayed to mount the steep back of them.

Dirt and rock alike was slimy with the rain. Boughs of trees came hurtling down, sweeping some from their grips to the maddened seas that now filled the little bay and, when the lightning came, seemed to

leap at them like ravening wolves, all fangs and slaver.

Up they crawled between the gusts, huddling in crevices, hugging their weapons, whipped by the storm, native and white man fighting for holds, struggling for possession of a slippery ledge.

Dawn found them clinging there, the remnant of them, a ghastly dawn that showed a weltering sea and scudding sky with gusty winds between. It was the ebb, but the tide retreated sullenly. There was no vestige of the camp, no fragment of the boat, no trace of those who had slid from the cliff or been torn away by wind and wave or falling branch.

The waterfall poured turbid, bearing broken masses of the forest. Of Taku's men but thirty were left. The wizard himself had survived, and Weissman counted all but one of his own. Spent, they sluggishly moved up the face of the escarpment to find rest and some sort of food, utterly beaten.

There was a small, rapidly vanishing lake in the crater. There the wind had whirled and the rain stabbed, yet the storm was welcome. Upolu had been carried into a volcanic blow-out and the rest had found shelter in a score of shallow caves, but every bowl was full and in some places pools would last for days.

Food was scarce but the water famine was over and their faith in Kalani was strong. Such storms were largely local and they believed that it had been sent to confound their enemies. She, the heaven-born, would not have been touched. Surely this was a sending from the high gods of the *Merikani*!

CHAPTER XVI

AT SEA

KALANI paddled steadily out into the dusk toward her guiding star.

Her body was weak from her exertions and from lack of food but her will sustained her and pumped the needed fibrin into her muscles from the reserves always ready to support the brave. Once free of the shore currents, she relaxed, broke the body of a fish, massaged it with her fingers and ate it raw, washing it down with a draft from a young coconut.

Then she paddled on, dexterously, strongly, sending the well-designed canoe along at good speed.

With the moon's lifting there came an off-shore wind and she socketed the slender mast and stayed it, setting her tiny sail, and with only an occasional paddle stroke to offset leeway sailed down the moon-path.

The pantheon of Talofah was a group of uncertainties. Kalani believed that the stars were truly the eyes of the gods and she believed them friendly. She believed that she was descended from heaven-born ones who were demigods, trading some of their powers for the privilege of earthly loves.

Chiefess that she was and knowing some of the mysteries, she was not bound, as many islanders are, to the gods of fear. Those, she knew, were often creatures of the wizards. There had been a quickening of her spirit with the sweet mystery of her love for Upolu.

Maternal instincts stirred broodingly within her as she sailed and the glory of bearing a child who would be a part of her, and, most of all and best, a child of Upolu, strengthened her belief in the universal beneficence of higher powers. Her soul was leavened with love, for Upolu, for her tribe, for the women and the helpless children depending upon her efforts.

She felt very ignorant under the bright expanse of heaven, abroad upon the far-reaching sea, yet in her was strong the basis of all creeds, faith. The wisdom of the *Merikani* was far greater than hers, she felt. She believed implicitly in them and in their gods and she wanted to know more of them. And, without words, her soul prayed to the stars.

On through the night the gentle winds wafted her, dropping at dawn in the eye of the sun, toward which she steered, setting up her pointer of twigs in the bow, offsetting leeway as she paddled by some knowledge half intuitive, half experience, blading ever eastward as the sun grew high.

Flying-fish skipped about her and dolphin chased them. She broke her fast and kept on with a steady stroke toward the horizon, trusting that the night would show her still upon the right course.

Her hands, torn by her climb, stiffened about the handles of the paddles but she stroked on beneath the heat, unconscious of fatigue, intent upon her mission, secure of its ending. Talofah became a blue cloud and faded into the sky. Mid-afternoon brought another wind, not quite so friendly, a quartering wind that she steered up

against, with occasional tacks to meet her judgment of the lee she lost.

So came evening and night with her pointer true to the stars that rose to greet her. The wind shifted favorably and she drowsed, sure that any change of course would awaken her, the sheet of the sail about her wrist. The morning came and found her rejoicing. Before noon the next day she hoped to sight land, the land where the *Merikani* dwelled.

Through it all she seemed to travel in a trance, half of ecstasy born of her perfect faith, half of a constant communion with the spirit of Upolu. Her soul yearned toward him and she felt that all was well with him. Sometimes she fancied he was with her in the canoe, invisible but unmistakably present. He seemed to murmur to her and then she would lose his voice in the ripple of the water about her canoe.

Yet Nature had its way with her, trying her purpose. She had brought no oil for her body and the rays of the sun began to blister her tender shoulders. When she exchanged sail for paddle she was conscious of a lack of elasticity but always her strength sufficed. She was young and her blood was pure; she came of a valiant race not yet effete with following the customs of men from other latitudes.

Once more a wind came at sunset and she lashed her paddle to offset its inclination, seeing that her tiny bark drove true before the sea cradled her and sleep helped the chemistry of her healthy body recharge its batteries.

As the hours passed she began to lose flesh. The constant effort told upon her tissues as she toiled. Her cheeks hollowed; circles showed under her eyes. She was visibly leaner and little lines graved themselves on her features. But her mind was at ease, her spirit content and her labor became almost automatic. Between wind and wind she paddled and in the winds she lashed her paddle and drowsed.

The second morning her keen island senses told her of a change in the weather. The storm that broke on Talofah was brewing but, far out at sea, as yet it merely grayed the sky and made the sea uneasy. Behind she saw far off the gathering of the tumult and knew that all the winds had been drawn to the combat. But ahead she ever expected to sight the loom of land.

If the tale of the ancient was true she

must be close to her journey's goal, for she had made wonderful progress. There was a weather-mist about the horizon but she was confident she was not far off her course, and, if the island was high-peaked, she should sight it for a margin of error of even a score of miles.

She still had food to spare and she still wove dreams of future happiness. Stern as was all her inheritance in such matters, she felt no personal desire for vengeance against the strangers. The *Merikani* would attend to that.

The sea began to bother her. The rim haze had thickened and the sun lost some of its power. She was vaguely troubled. She knew that the sudden storms of this season had a way of fierce and sudden fight in one locale and then of rebounding for minor but savage after-battles. If the southwestern winds prevailed, the struggle of the elements might be borne down upon her, so she scanned eagerly for a glimpse of land.

The waves were choppy and they slapped at the canoe with hints of nastiness. The water seemed to have stiffened. From yielding, friendly liquid it had become aggressive. The surface fish had disappeared; the sea had turned from deep blue to a purplish-brown that merged into a dingy yellow before the morning was three hours old. The dull gold of the sun was coppered and the lower sky held a pinkish hue.



TO WESTWARD, far astern, was a black curtain from which came sudden gusts of wind and flickers of lightning, followed by distant rumblings of thunder. The fitful wind was too uncertain for setting sail and she put her best efforts to her paddle. Every now and then the waves slapped over the low freeboard and she began to ship a little water. When it got ankle-deep she bailed with an empty coconut.

The black curtain with its quivering fires and deep mutterings of thunder was the back-flung, broken battalions of the north-east trades, chased by the southwest, swept back from the main fight over Talofah and its defeat among the peaks. The retreat was sullen but swift and Kalani in her tiny canoe was directly in its path.

Long before the wind reached her she could see the white line of cresting waves. As soon as the gusts showed a suggestion of steadiness she unfurled her sail and flew

before the gale, skimming the surface, her outrigger tipping ominously until she seated herself on its after-arm outside the gunwale.

It took careful steering at the speed she was making but she held her course, hoping to see some land lift in the murky east. The dull sun was half-way to the zenith and the mist that tarnished it was deepened by scud. Astern, the sky was covered with a vast pall of ebony black, outlined constantly by the glare of electricity that played behind it and broke through its folds in sizzling zigzags.

The thunder pealed ever louder and nearer and the gale increased. The crested waves overtook her. In their deep hollows the sea showed mottled but the tops of the surges were hills of yeasty foam, continually broken by the wind. Spindrift flew horizontally and the driven spray stung her bare shoulders.

It was a losing race with the one hope that the gale would break before it finally enveloped her. There was nothing to do but keep the canoe clear of water and steady before the wind.

If she had dared she would have taken down the sail, save for a tiny corner, but any decided movement might see the canoe broach. She had no time for thoughts, even of Upolu. Every atom of her being was already molded to the one desire and to the attainment of it her body would strive to the last drop of her vitality.

The sun faded to a wafer of fading red and then dissolved utterly. The light held some quality of day but limited the vision to the immediate waves. The battling elements overtook her. About her the wind shrieked and lashed the heaving seas to tumultuous resentment. The thunder boomed and out of the black the flaming javelins of lightning were flung athwart the sky.

A stroke of wind, furious as an explosion, plunged at her sail, driving the bows of the canoe beneath the surface, breaking the sheet and stays as a boy breaks pack-thread, snapping the mast and sending the remnants flying to leeward like a wrecked kite.

The little craft lost helm, despite Kalani's desperate attempt; the paddle was buffeted from her hands by a cross-wave; the outrigger, lifted as the canoe swung broadside, was tossed, side-swiped, broken.

Kalani dived between canoe and outrigger and came up clear. The waterlogged craft was being swept up the slope of a watery

hill, the arms of its smashed outrigger tossed as if in protest, emptied coconuts bobbing and, outstretched, undulating as it slowly sank, the war-cloth of the *Merikani*.

At sight of it Kalani mustered power. Her hair astream, she plowed her way through the hissing turmoil with powerful over-strokes and reached the flag, battling for it as she clung to the wreckage with one arm. The broken masses of sea pounded at her; the gale tore at her hair and almost stopped her breathing; but she hung on, battered, bruised, but dauntless, while the gale seemed to scream at her impudent rebellion to its force.

For two hours she struggled in the seethe of the tempest that had turned into a self-consuming thing by the sheer force of its own fury. The sun struggled through the rack, a timid wraith that gathered confidence. The wind faltered; the ragged remnants of the clouds broke utterly. With the warmth came color into sea and sky. The horizon cleared and in the west an argosy of pearly cloud-masses took the place of the black curtain.

Kalani lay across the hull of the canoe, the flag beneath her. The sun kissed her neck where the thick masses of hair had parted and benignly warmed her numb body. Soon she roused herself and got astride the boat. It was utterly useless to her now, save as a temporary resting-place. Without the outrigger log it could not float upright; paddle and mast and sail were gone. Gone too her provisions.

She brushed back the hair from her face and forehead and gazed about the rim of the sea. The sun was at zenith now but the slight declination told her which was east. And there, a stain of darker blue against the sky, lifted a mountain cone—the island surely, where the *Merikani* dwelled.

It was still a trifle misty though all haze was swiftly clearing, and it was hard to judge distances, save for the height of the land above the sea. Of that Kalani had no idea but her spirit leaped within her. Without doubt the evil gods had fought but the good gods had won. She could swim as easily as she could walk and she had little fear of sharks, little fear of anything now.

She bound up her hair above her head and then she took the flag and flat-folded it, wrapping it about her body between breasts and hips where it would least encumber her. All other clothing she discarded.

She slipped from the upturned canoe into the water, turned her face toward the land, clearer now with touches of violet and green like an opal, with suggestions of formation; not much more than a sea-league distant; and started to swim on her side, one shoulder submerged, one arm upflung in the South-Sea long-distance fashion where the under arm sustains flotation while it aids progress, a coordinate motion of graceful limbs as effortless and effectual as the flight of a homing gull.

CHAPTER XVII

TAKU BARGAINS

TAKU, coming back from a certain private reconnaissance of his own, grinned evilly as he broke through the forest toward the new camp that Weissman had chosen, this time on the top of the cliff, by the waterfall, in a clearing that he had made the islanders enlarge. Later he sent them fishing and foraging for supplies after they had all satisfied their first hunger on fruits and rested for a while in the sun.

Taku chuckled softly, remembering the grim look on Weissman's face. He began to think that the situation was turning his way at last, changing to where he could demand certain things and obtain them.

He knew that Weissman had counted upon using the whale-boat as the basis of the new craft though he did not know of Weissman's later determination to leave in the whale-boat itself. But, in any case, the boat was gone and with it much of the material that Weissman needed as shipwright. And there was something else up his sleeve.

When the islanders had first welcomed the strangers they had made them a fire in native fashion, with two pieces of wood of varying hardness, one grooved, one pointed. Until the storm that fire had never been allowed to go out. When Weissman had moved camp the night before the attack fresh fires had been lit by Taku's men from the old in unvarying custom.

Taku had never seen the white men make fire. They had come ashore without tobacco and had, so far through natural circumstance, never used the matches that several of them carried in the waterproof brass cases that are a part of South-Sea trading currency.

The idea that the spit-fire weapons might be used to create flame never occurred to him. He had a fixed idea that the white men had no means of making fire, an idea fostered by the fact that Weissman had breakfasted off fruit in his desire to get the clearing made and camp fixed according to his plans of military routine.

Taku had passed the word among the few of his men who were expert firemakers to deny all prowess in that line if they were questioned. It would tend to prove that these strangers were not so much more wonderful than he, Taku, since they could not warm themselves or cook their food without the aid of the islanders. They could not bully any of the Talofans into doing what they professed ignorance of, when they, the wise white men, could not themselves perform the trick.

It had been borne in upon Taku that the strangers' supremacy lay only in the possession of the spit-fires and the magic that made them work. He had knowledge of something that he would barter for this secret, a great double canoe of Kalani's, almost completed but still in the woods where the builders had worked upon it for the sake of the shade.

This would have been launched with due priestly ceremonies within the natural course of a week or more. It was a seaworthy craft, with a platform that would carry a superstructure, propelled by paddles or by a great lug sail.

He had gone to see if the storm had injured this, first warning his men to secrecy. His general air of confidence and the hints he had thrown of his having ferreted out, or rather discovered through his own powers, the mystery of the spit-fires, had already re-established somewhat of his waning supremacy.

Finding the big craft undamaged, lacking little for completion save some unfinished carvings for the twin prows that the white men could well dispense with, he had regained his own cock-sureness. With Weissman and his lordly crew gone and he, Taku, the wizard, master of the spit-fire, supremacy of the island would be easy. Any idea of Kalani having left the island he regarded only as a boast of the dying Talofan, a final defiance to his enemies, a common enough trick.

Once in possession of the spit-fire and in the full confidence of his followers, he had

no idea of allowing the strangers to obtain possession of Kalani or of any of the women. Weissman and his men might help to subdue the crater but at the last moment Taku and his pack, already mutinous against their enforced labors, would turn against the strangers and drive them into the sea.

At the right moment he himself would kill Weissman, to begin the affair. Perhaps some of the others would be killed. If so, so much the better. He would take their bodies and hang them up in his devil-cave. The attack would be in the woods where the spit-fires would have the least chance against native bush warfare. With Weissman dead he calculated that the surprise would be effective.

It was low cunning and its success was all based upon the trade of canoe for rifle. He had worked hard to conceal the double canoe behind a screen of brush and creepers that would keep green for many days and he had no fear that Weissman himself could find it. Then the death of Weissman by his hand was the keystone to the final triumph.

As he came to the edge of the clearing he halted, the grin wiped off his face. Men were piling up wood for a fire. Some had brought the dry inner bark of certain trees for kindling; dead boughs and branches had been collected. At first he thought that his own men had played traitor or had been forced by Weissman to acknowledge their spark-producing ability. Then he saw that they were looking at Weissman with an expectancy that was part incredulity, part surprise.

Weissman approached the little heap of bark. Without especial thought he took a match from his brass box, shut the container and slipped it back in his pocket. He flicked the head of the match under his nail with a sweep and, lo, flame appeared in the hollow of his hand!

There was no breeze and he knelt and applied the flame to the bark. It upflared and he turned to the natives to order them to pile on the thicker wood, finding them gazing at him with wide eyes and fallen jaws, withdrawn in evident fear and wonderment. Amid the trees Taku clutched at a palm stem to steady himself. The white wizard had plucked flame out of the air!

Weissman was swift to see what he had accomplished but he made no sign, tucking away his knowledge for future use. Taku had got a grip on himself and was advancing

from the grove. Weissman beckoned to him.

"Tell your men to start cooking," he said. "Where have you been?"

"Toward the pool of Manoa," lied Taku. "There are no sentries on the ridges. But there is no stir in the crater."

"Two men are on their way there now," replied Weissman.

The men who had been posted there during the storm had crept into camp half drowned and Weissman, after cursing them for deserting their stations, had despatched a relief.

"There will be plenty of water in the crater now," said Taku. "A pool forms there after heavy rains."

"But no food," said Weissman shortly.

He was bothered about the building of a ship. He had not destroyed the canoe fleet by the Summer camp of Kalani, but a messenger had been sent and returned with the news that the storm had flindered everything, even the burned tinders of the palace and the other buildings, leaving the bay strewn with splintered wreckage. He had held a brief thought of making a catamaran from the biggest of these though his men were not expert paddlers.

But he had not carried out this thought very far until he received word of conditions, and now this hope was gone. His men's nerves were shattered by the storm and the death of their comrade. It had driven from them everything but the desire to get away, motivated by the fear that Kalani might have actually gone on an errand of rescue. They were on edge.



WEISSMAN had told them roughly that Kalani herself must have perished in the storm but he knew that he spoke without sufficient conviction. Still a craft of some kind must be created, nails or no nails.

He took out his clasp-knife and commenced to whittle a stick. This was another thing that Taku coveted and his eyes glittered greedily. But he kept them downcast.

"Taku," said Weissman, "we must start to make a ship. One-half your men must get the wood, the other half get much food."

"What kind of a ship?" parried Taku.

"That is for me to decide. I will show you the kind of wood I want. See that your men get busy."

"It will not be easy to make them work," said the wizard. "Already they grumble."

"You are their leader."

Weissman spoke meaningly and took his automatic carelessly from its holster.

"You have strong magic," said Taku. "Yet I do not think your magic will make dead men alive again. And dead men can not labor, nor will slaves work fast or willingly. Yet it is strong magic."

He looked longingly at the pistol.

"We could build the ship without your help," said Weissman, "but it would take much time. If your men worked well and fast it would be right that their leader should be rewarded. Before I go, Taku, if all is well, I will show you the magic. I will give you one of these weapons."

"One of the long ones?"

"Yes."

"You will aid me to clear the crater, you taking the pearls?"

"That has been said already."

"You will show me how to pluck the flame from the air?"

"You go fast, Taku. Take care that you do not ask too much."

He snapped open the lid of the box under cover of his pocket and palmed a match.

"This is what you mean?" he asked as wrist and hand made a swift movement and he showed the wizard the glowing match, caged between his fingers.

Taku's face was ludicrous as he tried to repress his awe. He did not trust himself for words but nodded.

A match or two did not mean much, thought Weissman. As for the rifle, he would see.

"It all depends how fast you work," he bargained.

The wizard's face lit up. He set up two sticks in the turf. The shadow of one fell an inch or two short of reaching the other.

"Let me speak with my men until the sun-mark joins both the twigs," he said. "Then I will tell you what may be done."

Weissman nodded and Taku called his men apart from the cooking, drew them in a close circle about him and talked in low, swift native.

"I have drawn the brains from the white chief," he said. "I have gained the magic of the spit-fire. I shall be able to pluck the flame from the air. This has taken much time and great wisdom for it was a new

magic to me. And now this is in my head. These strangers shall aid us to humble Kalani and Upolu, if he is not dead. And their following. Some will be killed; the rest shall walk very humbly and our shadows shall be sacred to them. The men shall do the cooking, as Kalani threatened we should do, and the women shall be divided among us.

"These white men will we drive away. But first I shall kill this chief with his own magic. Him and maybe some others. And ye shall all be chiefs and your children chiefs after them. Many great things have I in mind for us which I shall tell you later. But first we must make these white fools help us fight and to that end I shall give them the great canoe that is hidden in the glen of Haili."

"But that is tabu," answered one of them, and the others backed him by murmurs. "It is the royal canoe!"

"Am I not royal?" asked Taku. "There shall be no tabu but my tabu. It is in my mind that we may kill all these white men, but the canoe is a bribe for their fighting for us at the crater, though they may think, for all their cunning, that we fight for them. Also, if I did not offer them the canoe they would make you labor to build them a ship and I think we have been slaves long enough to these people."

"If you have gained their magic how can they prevail against you?" queried a man.

Taku frowned at him and marked him for later discipline.

"Fool!" he said. "I am but one against them. When they are gone, my magic will be supreme. True, I am their equal. When they are gone you shall see. Talofah shall be the center of a great royalty. And you too shall rule."

He had gripped them. He held them enough for the present purpose. Later, when he showed them the magic of the flame and the spit-fire, he would develop his plans for turning against the strangers. Now all he wanted was their promise.

"They must not know where the canoe lies," he said. "I have hidden it. If one of you tell them, for they may ask, our plans will vanish like smoke. First I must arrange with them to take the crater, for which there is already a plan. Swear to be silent."

He got their assent and sent them back to the cooking, telling them that they must go

craftily for the present. Then he returned to Weissman. The shadow was just touching the second stick as he hunkered down, sweat on his brow from his exertions.

"Give me the long stick that spits fire," he said. "Show me its magic and show me the magic of the flame that grows in the air."

"When the boat is finished."

"It is built. Oh-ho! I too, white wizard, have strong magic. Give me what I ask and I will show you the boat. It is like this."

On a spot free from turf he sketched with a stick the form of the big canoe as it would be when finished, with mast and sail, and praised its sea-going qualities.

"It is tabu," he said. "I alone can break that tabu. And it is yours if you will give me what I ask for—and that," he added, pointing at the knife."

Weissman thought rapidly. He fancied he could find out where the canoe was without Taku's aid but he wanted to get the pearls and leave Talofah without loss of time. He knew the qualities of well-built double canoes. And this was a royal craft. It would serve better than any makeshift they might create. He tossed the knife toward Taku. Then he took the match-box from his pocket.

"Here are magic fire-sticks," he said. "Before I leave I will teach you how to make others. But waste not these for it will take long before you can learn how to make more. So you take one—and so——"

He flicked the match slowly and Taku strove to imitate him. But the sulfur head jammed and burned into his flesh. Weissman watched with a covert grin but the wizard did not wince.

"It is strong magic," he said. "But I shall master it. Where is the spit-fire?"

"That is even stronger magic," said Weissman. "Without wisdom you will kill yourself."

"I shall be careful. Give it me."

"Show me the canoe," said Weissman.

After the meal that was ready they went into the woods and both came back triumphant. Taku carried Weissman's rifle. He had fired it once, with both eyes shut and a shudder as the recoil jammed his shoulder. True, Weissman had emptied the magazine but Taku did not know that.

Weissman was taking no chances. He

explained that the fire had spat by virtue of his, Weissman's, magic, and that there was much yet to learn before Taku could achieve a like result. He felt sure that Taku would not be able to resist a second trial, perhaps before his men. The failure would do him good. But however much he rightly decried Taku's magic he foolishly failed to appreciate properly the wizard's cunning.



NOW Weissman was all for action. He explained the plan of laddering the cliff and set all hands to work getting timbers to place in the crevices and to construct a wooden shield. He determined to try to reach the ledge that night, working by moonlight. Established on that vantage point by daylight, the rifles could pick off such of the defenders of the crater as exposed themselves and keep the way clear for an assault by Taku's band. For all their water, he figured that from lack of solid food the defense would be weak and easily mastered.

Then the pearls and then to the canoe. They could get along without dried fish, and it would not take long to provision it with fresh stuff. As for the question of women, that could wait. He would warn his men of possible treachery and he knew that their present mood ran with his, to get clear of Talofah. The storm that had taken one of their number had done much to drive home what he had told them about the rains.

On Temeteri they had their snug-roofed buildings, their indoor amusements. On Talofah, judging by the sample they had already experienced, the rains were to be avoided. And there was always the hint of Kalani and a rescue. It was a risk that should not be overlooked.

He was certain he could handle his men when the time came. If they found that Kalani had actually left the island and taken the pearls with her, he resolved on a bloody reprisal for his disappointment, but he did not fancy that Kalani esteemed the pearls as sufficiently valuable for such precaution. Of love and its appraisals Weissman was a poor judge.

There was one other thing he did not forget—the flag. He had not yet made up his mind what humiliation he would design for that. He trusted to the inspiration of the moment and his own rottenness.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE REEF

THE sun had slid more than half-way down the western sky when Kalani approached the reef-surf of the island she had fought so hard to reach. For a long time she had marked the long line of high cliffs that sloped sharply to the beach and, above them, shouldering heights of forest lifting to one rounded summit.

Here and there these cliffs divided and she caught glimpses of lovely valleys set with breadfruit groves and palms, a silver ribbon of waterfall at their farther ends, but she had looked in vain for sign of habitation. The land was beautiful but lonely and as the sun sank and shadows lengthened, giving the isle the semblance of a wondrous jewel, her spirit for the first time drooped.

She had expected to see the *Merikani's* cloth of red, white and blue flying proudly to greet her, but here was not even the tiniest thread of smoke, no canoes in sight, only the long line of surf through which she could see no entrance.

The closer she came to it the higher it rose in a wall of green jade, shutting off her view of all but the heights, surging in to crash upon the coral an almost impenetrable barrier. The odds were tremendous against even the freshest, most expert of swimmers passing through to the calm lagoon through such a rank of turbulence.

Caught in the resistless impulse, the swimmer would be flung down upon the coral against which the breakers chafed angrily. Limbs, if not broken instantly, would be torn cruelly, poisoned with the living contents of those tiny limestone cells, and the broken body would be ground and rolled until spewed contemptuously into the lagoon, mere shark-meat.

Faith and love and hope had buoyed her up so long that now she felt as the beginner who suddenly finds himself without support or company in deep waters. She had based all on a legend, the ingratiating prattle of a slave, echoed by a doddering old man. She had left Upolu to die as presently she would, of volition or circumstance, but they must die apart. Or else she had set the wrong course, miscalculated her stars or her leeway.

She turned, feeling already the suction of the big rollers as they gathered speed for the charge, and swam along that line of

green, mounting in green hills with buoyant foam bells cresting them as they rose higher, higher, curving over at last and roaring down to hammer on the stubborn reef that smashed the jade to sparkling crystals holding all the hues of the rainbow as they splintered down and sent their last impulses snaking across the lagoon to die before they touched the inner beach.

Now and then she raised herself almost waist high from the water with down-pressing palms and feet, looking in vain for the sign of a gap in the coral. The tide was flooding; in a little while the water would be at its deepest when it swept across the barrier. Tiring now, for the fight through the storm and the long swim had made heavy calls upon her strength and she was both hungry and terribly thirsty, she found herself striving to make up her mind to attempt the crossing.

Even if it was the wrong island, or if the *Merikani* no longer lived there, she could get food and water. She was bound to fight to the end. She could not swim on very much longer. Once the sun was down, if she could last that long, the chance of getting across the reef was reduced to less than none. It would be certain death.

If it had been only for herself she would have been glad to draw the water deep into her lungs and to relax, sinking down into the soft smoothness that now sustained her. But she visioned Upolu suffering, the women and the children, the treachery of Taku and the brutality of the men with the spit-fires ever threatening the slowly starving defenders in the crater.

The war-cloth was still about her body. Surely, surely, she who had come so far was not meant to fail! Out of desperation hope climbed once again and she swam slowly on, trying to judge where the coral was farthest from the surface, by the sound and look of the surf.

There was not much choice, apparently. And she had to make the trial before she got any weaker. She took a few strokes seaward and then, floating, rewrapped the flag more firmly. She lay quietly, finning gently with her hands to offset the pull and the roll of the surface while she took breath for the effort.

Then once more she raised herself, facing landward. While she had floated her soul had prayed. There were no phrases, no words, fashioned in her brain, no sound

uttered through her lips, but her whole being had yearned up to some Great Beneficence that it acknowledged as simply as her body breathed. Now, glancing to right and left, she saw a dazzle of radiance on an incoming wave. It was the sun shining on the wetness of a piece of drifting timber.

Call it miracle or coincidence, as your own faith is wide or narrow. Floating logs are not uncommon in such places. Some come from the nigh land, others from long distances, attracted to the solid earth by natural law and the flow of the currents and the tides. This was a plank, mill-sawed, a good twelve inches broad and two thick, some fourteen feet in length.

About one end of it still trailed some sodden strands of rope; the entire board was spotted with various colors. From all indications it was a painter's platform, slung overside a ship and lost by carelessness or accident.

To Kalani the Great Beneficence had sent it; beyond cavil, it was a sending of the *Merikani* gods. She swam to it eagerly and tested it. It had been long in the sea; there were barnacles upon the under side; yet the oils in the paint, with which it was so liberally smeared, seemed to have prevented it losing its natural buoyancy. It rode high and it carried her weight without too great displacement.

To ride the surf, the rollers of the lagoon, after they have passed the coral to come racing in, gradually slowing down against the immobility of the protected lagoon waters; to come in kneeling, standing on a surf-board, poised in exactly the right spot of the wave-crest, is a knack that even the white man has learned to catch.

But to ride the surf-breakers in all their fury as they first fling themselves across the coral is a vastly different affair, yet Kalani triumphantly prepared to achieve the feat. She shifted herself forward until she judged the angle right, then slipped off the plank and, her hands firmly limpeted to its edges, swam slowly reefward, waiting to be overtaken by the big wave she had noticed forming behind her.

Two she let by, following the second on its flanks. The heaving mass of the third came up about her; the breaker began to take form as the sharp slope of the reef compelled its rearing. A hissing crest began to show and curve and curl. High on its shoulder Kalani swam furiously, her legs

churning as she strove to gain her place. She vaulted on her steed, its forward end projecting through the overarch of the wave.

With the speed of a railroad train she was swept on. The mighty mass of water of which the breaker was the temporary leader at that point, pressed against the coral wall, upward, onward and then came the moment when the reef-top sheared off the excess water and the wave broke in its moment of flaunting victory. In a smother of spray Kalani was flung forward and downward as the breaker lost solidity, dissolved into foam and could no longer sustain her.

She felt the plank grating and bumping on the coral while masses of yeasty air and water encompassed her, beating her down, furious at individual failure, intent upon the destruction of this mortal who had dared to make a convenience of an element. It was torn from her grasp and she was whirled, spun like a teetotum beneath the surface, her heart pounding in her breast, her lungs burning.

Something struck her, the plank or a jut of the coral, and she lost consciousness, though still she fought madly to get to air. Her last thought and fear was that the flag was unrolling from about her.



THEN came a burst of sun and air. The blessed oxygen reached the shriveling foliage of her lungs; the red, revived blood shot through her body and her heart rebounded from its diastole. Back to her brain came instinct, then will.

She was in the lagoon; the friendly plank floated close by; the talisman, the flag, was still about her. Her legs were slightly lacerated from the sharp coral, there was a cut about her temple and she was for the moment exhausted so that she clung to the plank gladly, knowing herself wafted slowly beachward until presently she grounded on the sand.

Fifteen minutes later she had uncovered and devoured twenty turtle's eggs, tearing the tough integument off the round white balls with her teeth; she had taken her fill of fresh water from a cliff cascade and she had started munching white guavas. Half a mile away the great waves pounded at the reef. But they were like caged lions who raven at the bars; she had tamed them, passed their cordon.

The sun was lowering ominously with less than two hours of daylight left. And still

there was no sign of human life. She decided to traverse the next deep valley she came to and work to higher ground. It was very possible that the other side of the island was the more favored, for all the charm of this.

She walked south at a good pace, her shadow long beside her. To cover her nakedness she draped the flag about her and as she went the leveling rays soon dried it with the help of the breeze.

Suddenly she stopped. There was the sound of song, of women's voices. Kalani had speculated a little on the character of the natives, should she meet them, and now she was reassured. Where people sing they are not altogether cruel, she thought, and was glad to find she recognized many of the words though they were differently consonanted from the dialect of Talofah.

The singing became louder as she advanced toward the entrance to a gorge from which a river emerged and formed a bar-bound lagoon of fresh water. Portions of this placid lake were divided off by stone walls rising a foot or more from the surface, formed of heavy stones.

Out of the valley came an informal procession of women and young girls, dressed in simple gowns of bright-colored cloth. All laughed or sang and all were garlanded. Some of them carried calabashes and others bore nets draped across their ample shoulders.

At sight of the strange figure they stopped short, watching Kalani, weary but erect, her shapely limbs bruised and scratched, her long hair awry, partly matted with blood from the cut on her forehead, clad in the flag with its stars mantling her bosom and the stripes kilting her. Forlorn though she seemed, there was unmistakable royalty in her mien.

She came toward the group with one hand advanced and open-palmed, giving the universal South-Sea greeting of love and friendship. It was answered and she was surrounded by the islanders, murmuring little words of pity as they saw her wounds, placing garlands about her, sending back young girls for fresh coconuts and with irreproachable courtesy curbing their burning curiosity until she chose to enlighten them.

"We have come to the fish-ponds to net mullet for the feast tomorrow," they told her. "You must stay with us and share the good things."

"I can not," said Kalani. "For I have come a long way and suffered many things upon my mission. I am Kalani, the heaven-born and chiefess of Talofah. Tell me, are there any of the *Merikani*, whose war-cloth hides my nakedness, upon this island?"

They were pressing fruit upon her now, and at a brisk order a slip of a girl raced back up the valley.

"Our village lies half-way toward the mountain," said one of the women. But most of our people now dwell upon the far side of the island where the *Merikani* have their big dwellings and where they grow *cacao* upon the hills and have many groves for copra. Have you any *Merikani* in your own land of Talofah that you wear their colors?"

A mist floated before Kalani's eyes, but she dissipated it by the strength that welled up from her happiness. She had won through.

"Tomorrow," said the woman, "after you have rested, we will take you there."

"No," Kalani answered. "Listen to my tale. I must reach them before the sun goes down."

Swiftly she told them all that had happened. Before she finished the young girl had returned bearing a gown of yellow cloth. Its texture was new to Kalani as she suffered them to attire her swiftly.

"It is a long way and you are weary," the woman who had done most of the talking persisted. "Can you ride a horse?"

The word was strange to Kalani and they tried to describe the animal, praising its swiftness and gentleness. Kalani would have mounted a dragon to fulfil her quest and she begged them to lead her to the beast.

Wherever and whenever in Polynesia the horse has been introduced the native has shown singular facility for handling it. Up to a short time ago, if not at present, the record for hog-tying in a national contest was made by an Hawaiian. Native polo teams and individual players have noticeably put up stiff games and even as he is the most skilled of boatmen so is the South-Sea cowboy highly rated as a fearless and most excellent performer.

But it took no small courage for Kalani, suddenly introduced to this strange beast, to mount it and essay to control it. How many of us have faced such circumstances with trepidation, despite our familiarity

with the horse as a domestic and generally peaceful animal?

It was saddled and stirrured and bridled and into these mysteries Kalani was speedily inducted with kindness and a reverence inspired by her undoubted rank. The horse knew the way well, she was told. There were few turnings off the main road. She was to let it alone and merely encourage it until she saw the plantation houses on the far side of the island. Up and down steep hills she must go slowly but, the tableland reached, she must go at top speed of the animal if she hoped to reach the *Merikani* houses before dark.

 WHEN she was lifted to the saddle many ran beside her for a way until the trail began to mount steeply out of the valley. Then she was given a draft of *kawa* and, with their pleasant voices sounding more and more faintly as the sure-footed horse stepped briskly up the path, Kalani found herself once more exultant, ashamed of her past doubts and weakness, riding, as one in a legend, upon this beast that was so strange, so strong yet so gentle and willing, riding on the last lap of her journey.

The up-trail was full in the sun but on the high tableland the shadow of evening already lay flat as a cloth. Great trees grew in vast groves and the road led under them quite often. With widened nostrils, snorting in contempt of the light weight he bore, the horse galloped easily along through the gloom of these places, on through the purple twilight, high-touched with vermillion and orange lights, that marked the crests of the higher terraces and ever crept up to the topmost peak.

These were the minute hands of Kalani's clock. Something in her incessantly urged that she arrive before dark, that no time was to be lost; she feared that they would not set out to rescue before morning if she did not do so; she was pricked with the fears and spur of fever that always marks the close of an important quest.

At last the road began to descend once more, ribboning a deep gorge that was purple with early twilight. Far above her the mountain-top was aglow; ahead, the deep ultramarine of the sky was blazing with what would soon be the afterglow. A torrent ran beside her, steely-pooled, save where the water caught the reflection of the flaming clouds.

The bright greens of the foliage deadened as she descended, the horse clicking a careful progress on the steeper pitches. The evening wind blew chill in the draft of the gorge; high walls towered on either side. She met no one in this gap of silence and it soon grew so dark in the twistings of the ravine that she could no longer see the road beneath her. Only, far overhead, the pasteled, pulsing clouds of richest rose told that the day was not yet done.

There came a sudden curve that twisted back upon itself, S-wise. She saw the crinkled sea, a line of reef-surf, the sky, changing hues like a frightened chameleon, orderly rows of plantation trees far below with the road, now plainer to see as it emerged from the cliffs, stretching down along easy gradients. Out of thicker trees a knoll lifted and some roofs of corrugated iron flashed back the afterglow.

Beside the gorge through which Kalani had come a more jagged gash mitered the island. Down this wild corridor the sun, dipping to the sea-rim, flashed a farewell beam. It caught something waving at the top of a tall-staff near the corrugated houses, something that whipped out in the breeze, tiny but plain in that sudden stab of light.

It was the mate of the flag that draped Kalani above her borrowed gown, the war-cloth of the *Merikani*, the Stars and Stripes! Just for a moment it hung suspended, illumined, then it slowly sank on the staff and was hidden in the trees. To Kalani it was a signal, a wave of welcome and of promise.

Some vagary of the seaward winds stroked the vaporous wisps of ruddy cloud into parallel lines. In the deep blue of the zenith stars began to shine. The whole western sky was hung with a vision of the flag.

"The eyes of the gods!" cried Kalani. "The blood-red bands of friendship!" Then, to the horse, "Oh, hurry, hurry!"

Something of her spirit communicated itself to the gallant steed. He flung up his head and started, first to canter, then to gallop at top speed down the slanting road as the sea and sky blended into veils of violet where a myriad stars glittered. Mane and tail outflung, Kalani's tresses and the ends of the war-cloth streaming in the speed of their going, they rushed down through the twilight that swiftly deepened into night. Kalani sat straight and supple

in the saddle and the rhythm of the hoofs of the strange beast bounding beneath her beat out an accompaniment to the triumphant pulsing in her veins.

CHAPTER XIX

BY SEA AND SKY

LIUTENANT-COMMANDER FREEMAN, of the cruiser *Norwich*, was not in love with this present South-Sea detail. Since America had joined the Allies her sea-forces had to do their share in the patrol of Oceania, the guarding of American possessions, the escorting of American troops to join with the Japanese forces in Siberia.

All that was necessary but bloodless. The Australians and New Zealanders had had the picking of all the real fun. There was little chance of a new *Emden* to be chased and riddled, and all of the enemy holdings and wireless stations had been destroyed. Some few German plantation men had fled to the hills where the bushmen would be likely to account for them by an increase in smoked-head collections.

All the *Norwich* had to do was to make the sea rounds of the particular district to which she had been assigned until the time came for the division of Germany's colonial possessions in the South Pacific. Nothing exciting, not even a gun fired save in salute or perfunctory practises and Freeman blamed the luck that had picked him for the job.

Over in the Atlantic, while Von Tirpitz might be bottled up in the Kiel Canal, there was something doing anyway with the convoys and the U-boats. The battle of Jutland, the closing of the submarine bases, a brush once in a while, the hope of one final slam-bang battle. But here? They might as well be on shore, for all the prospect of fun.

"Perhaps," said Evans, executive officer for Freeman, striving to impregnate his voice with a hope he could not feel, "perhaps they will come out of their hole, not so much in the idea of winning a regular engagement as of breaking through, even a few of them round Scotland, and try and raise merry — with New York to get even with us for licking them."

"Fat lot of good that'll do us," suggested the paymaster.

"One of 'em might get around into the Pacific," said Evans.

"Nothing doing," wound up Freeman. "We might as well be herding goldfish in a mill-pond. The Anzacs beat us to it at Temeteri. There's no more excitement in the Pacific than there is in the Japanese lily-pond in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco."

"Nothing doing," echoed Evans gloomily. "If there was it wouldn't come our way. Why, the war may be over now for all we know. Nobody would send us a special; we're off the regular wireless flashes. There hasn't been an interesting item for a week. Rotten statics and too long radius. We're out of it."

He gloomed at the darkening horizon.

"Look at it," he said. "Nothing bigger in sight for five days than a flying-fish. No landfall, no nothing. And I should have liked to have killed just one German. When my innocent-eyed posterity, if I ever am able to afford any, look me in my face and say, 'Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?' what'll I tell 'em? Eh? Tell 'em that me and one Bill Freeman spent the time on an antiquated sea-going mowing-machine, trimming the wavelets in Uncle Sam's back-yard, the Pacific Ocean?"

"Some sunset," said the paymaster.

Evans turned on him.

"You make me sick," he ejaculated. "Chow must be nearly ready. Come on and occupy your mouth with something better than admiring the weather. Sunset! Looks as if it might be the reflection from the battlefields on the other side of the world. And this is about as near as we'll ever get to it. Sunset. Ugh!"

Lieutenant-Commander Freeman caught him by the arm as he was about to turn away.

"Hold on Dave. Take a second look. Did you ever see a sunset just like that one? Look at it, 'Pay.' Gentlemen, it's a sign of victory set in the heavens. Our flag!"

They whipped off their caps and stood bareheaded in the presence of the phenomenon that Kalani had gazed at with such reverent wonder. Bar upon bar of glowing crimson striped the lower sky and above all the stars emblazoned the blue. As the colors throbbed in the east the mighty drapery seemed waving. Now others saw it and soon all on deck were gazing reverently and uncapped at the vision.

Slowly the glory waned. There was silence on the sea as the great ship plowed

through the waves that threw off a luminous glow at stem and sides and in the softly hissing wake, as if the ocean wished to share in the glory that overarched it.

Freeman gave a low order. Over the water, while the stars usurped the field of blue, the cruiser's band played majestically "The Star-Spangled Banner" and then "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," while all that cruiser's company that viewed the scene felt something of the mystic splendor kindling in their souls.

"Old Glory!" said Freeman as the last notes died.

"The shining of the grail!" said the Welshman, Evans.

The paymaster was neither poetical nor apt at reverence. He merely said—

"Amen."



ONE bell later a message from the wireless room was brought to the commander as he sat at mess. He read and handed it to Evans.

SOUTHERN CROSS TRADING COMPANY,
ISLE OF FUTUIKA

Commander U.S.S. *Norwich*.

Chiefess Kalani of island of Talofah arrived here *alone* after canoe voyage and long swim. Announces her island attacked by men who have killed many and are now besieging remnant. These men not Americans. Kalani calls their leader Waisimani. Think from this and general description man must be Weissman, factor of the Wendekreis Plantation on Temeteri lately destroyed by cruiser *Wellington*. Kalani asks protection of American flag claiming former benefits that suggest United States protectorate. Brought American flag with her from Talofah.

JOHN TREADWAY,
Superintendent.

"You may kill your German after all, Davey," said Freeman. "But I never heard of an island of Talofah. Let's look it up."

Neither charts nor Directory of the Pacific acknowledged the existence of Kalani's little kingdom and Freeman sent back a request to Futuika for latitude and longitude.

"Treadway isn't the sort to go off half-cocked," he commented to Evans. "And there were some Boches escaped from that Temeteri raid. Must have got away to this Talofah later. Darn queer, the girl bringing the flag with her. Swam with it too. This seems to be flag-day all round."

Soon the answer came.

Uncharted and unknown. Kalani states can give stellar position and estimated distance. Will you come?

"Stellar position," queried Evans. "Wonder what she imagines that is? Still they do know something about sidereals. Are you going?"

Freeman showed him the message he had written out for Sparks.

Coming. Expect us before midnight. For the flag.
U.S.S. *Norwich*,

Lt.-Com. W. E. FREEMAN, Commanding.

"Reads a bit bombastic, that 'for the flag' stuff, perhaps," said Freeman, "but somehow it seems to fit the occasion. And now, Mr. Evans, full speed ahead to Futuika, if you please."

CHAPTER XX

THE CUNNING OF TAKU

THE work of making the ladder up the cliffs was completed without much trouble before daylight. It was a crude affair, but entirely scalable with the rough timbers thrust into place along a diagonal split and other occasional fissures and so reaching at last the narrow ledge on which Kalani herself had stood for a few seconds before she continued her flight across the peaks.

Standing on this spot, Weissman imagined that he could easily continue his scaling process by the help of wooden supports but he had no idea that any human person unassisted could have won a way. He looked down in the crater, his rifle in the hollow of his arm, exultant. The moon was well up and the little caldera showed like a bowl half of ebony, half of silver.

Along the rim above the pool of Manoa, crest of the slope up which Taku and his men would later charge while the rifles covered them, Weissman fancied he distinguished certain figures among a litter of rocks, evidently hauled there in readiness for an assault. In the bottom of the bowl lay huddled the rest of the defenders, asleep. Here and there were little shelters of bark-cloth.

Weissman wondered beneath which of these Kalani or Upolu slumbered. For a moment he was tempted to fire into the thick of them and enjoy their sudden alarm. But he was too long-headed for that. Upolu particularly he wanted to get hold of, no more damaged than he might be at present. Whatever life was left in him Weissman had

resolved to squeeze out slowly in the most painful fashion he could devise in front of Kalani.

At the end of it he planned on wrapping the flag, already well befouled by all the Germans, about Upolu and using the latter's body as a target.

For Kalani—there were many cruelties and indignities he wanted to practise upon her, but so long as he got the pearls he was willing to forego them. It was best to play safe, to avoid a possible clash with Taku, to get away from the island.

Following this idea he postponed the early-morning attack until the double canoe should be fully ready for sea and actually launched in the lagoon. A few hours more starvation for the native garrison would make the victory easier. The placing of the ladder-rungs had been easier than expected; the wooden shield had not been needed; the exhausted Talofans had slept through what little noise had been necessary.

Weissman satisfied himself that his point of vantage commanded practically all the crater and then descended to the head of the valley that paralleled, with a sharp ridge between, the burned vale of Manoa, joining his own men and Taku with his warriors. He briefly explained his change of tactics and they all returned to their camp for a little sleep before launching the double canoe in the morning.

The delay suited Taku. It assured the fact that Weissman meant to get his men away from Talofah at the earliest opportunity, and Taku was inclined to let them go after he had killed Weissman and they had chased the rest to the canoe. The wizard had managed to discover a way of lighting the matches frictionally without burning his finger-tips, and by a judicious display of this power he had largely regained his own ascendancy. Now if he could kill Weissman, who had humiliated him, with his own magic, and get rid of the rest of the strangers, his would be the power absolute.

Very early in the morning he left camp and departed to his devil-cave, bearing his rifle. He intended to take no part himself in loading the canoe and getting it into the water, though he had issued orders to his followers to see the matter through.

His trouble with lighting the matches had taught him caution. He was sure that Weissman had expected him to burn him-

self and he was suspicious of the spit-fire. Of the actual mechanism of the rifle he knew nothing. But the gift of the matches in their box had suggested to him that the cartridges might be some similar contrivance, some sort of food for the spirit that certainly must live in the spit-fire stick.

He had noticed them being slipped into the breech, being swallowed, as he imaged it, and he thought it quite possible that the weapon Weissman had presented him with might be very empty in its stomach. Weissman's statement that Taku had only fired it through his, Weissman's, permissive magic, had not been altogether accepted by Taku.

Magic was magic, and in all magic there were tricks. He had thought Weissman actually conjured flame out of the air—and there had been fire-sticks. They were wonderful enough but Weissman had used sleight of hand to heighten the wonder, as Taku did, in all his own performances. The fire-sticks were tangible. So were the cartridges.

In the early-morning light he sat in the mouth of his cave and turned over and about the rifle, admiring the beauty with which different materials had been put together. Remembering the powerful kick against his shoulder, he had a very deep respect for the devil who dwelled inside the thing and who was indubitably fed with the shining cylinders. Weissman had not given him any of these things but he figured on securing them from Weissman's body after he had killed him.

It was after a lot of hesitation, prompted to take the chance only by the bright visions of his own future greatness, that he tried to depress the lever that replenished the breech from the magazine. This he knew by close and constant watching to be necessary between shots. All the time he was afraid the devil might break loose through some chink that he might inadvertently open.

He was fairly sure that Weissman had not set a trap for him because Weissman still needed him, but it was very gingerly that he worked the lever. It went down and came back with a click that startled him as it set the trigger. Then he aimed the rifle seaward and pulled.

While Weissman had hoped Taku might make his attempt to handle the white man's magic in public and so lose prestige, Taku

was wide awake to the same thing. Disappointed as he was when the rifle merely clicked again without flash and roar, the wizard, clucked to his own foresight in avoiding humiliation and immediately decided upon his move. He had proudly exhibited the spit-fire to his men, coupled with the announcement that he would use it in battle the next morning. And that he would still do when the time came. But the first shot would be for Weissman.

Weissman had arranged to charge up the slope of the crater with Taku and his warriors, one of his own men with him as body-guard, the rest on the ledge reached by the leader, as enfiladers. He meant to lose no time in securing the flag and pearls and wreaking his revenge on Upolu. Moreover, this maneuver would keep his men apart from the native women after the victory and aid him to corral them in a body and make for the canoe, anticipating any trouble from Taku.

To this arrangement Taku cordially agreed. It was a case of wolf against monkey, with Weissman, as the wolf, making the always costly error of despising the wits of his antagonist and relying on his own superior force.



TAKU clucked several times as he painted his face and donned his war garments. The end of the day should see his supremacy absolute. Kalani he meant to take to himself as one of two wives. Vaega was his other choice. She had wits and beauty, if not the charm of Kalani. But she would be able to keep Kalani controlled, humiliated. As for Upolu, his joints would be cracked and he should be swung head down above a smudge before being fed to the sharks.

Taku should reign. There should be no tabu but his tabu. His fame would go out to many islands and they would send delegations to him with much tribute.

He would have liked to take all the fire-sticks away from the strangers, to have killed all of them, but he was fearful for that issue. With Weissman dead he felt that they would be lacking another leader. He recognized Weissman as a chief, as one with authority that the rest lacked. They had no qualities of organization. None of them would be able to drive Taku and his men to menial tasks, as Weissman had done.

If they did not choose to go away in the

canoe, Taku would destroy it and then use bush warfare against them, picking off one at a time. As soon as Weissman was killed Taku and his men would dive for cover and begin their harassment. But he felt pretty sure the strangers would lose heart with the death of their chief and break for the canoe and the open sea. So he would be well rid of them.

At last he completed his war array and took a look at his inverted image in the pool with much satisfaction. He was kilted with gray beards and long black tresses and he jangled with shells and bones as he strutted back to the camp, rifle in one arm, the other cuddling a calabash.

Weissman, gone himself to superintend the launching, had left two men at the cliff-clearing by the waterfall. They grinned at Taku as he approached in all his fantastic panoply and geyed him in their own tongue. The wizard sensed the ridicule but smiled amiably, and showed his calabash. It was filled with a dish-watery fluid, not unlike English ginger-beer.

"Kawa," said Taku.

The gross Teutonic faces lit and one of them picked up the empty half of a coconut shell and started to help himself when the other restrained him.

"It may be some trick, Bachman," he warned. "Make the wizard drink first."

Bachman handed over the shell to Taku, who, well aware of what was in their minds, smiled again, dipped out a generous portion of the fluid and drained it, smacking his lips with gusto.

The ban was off; the twain followed suit, laughing at getting ahead of their fellows, warming as the strong liquor, brewed with especial care by Taku, burned in their stomachs and permeated body and brain alike.

The calabash was two-thirds empty and Bachman on his fourth dipper. Taku sat cross-legged, grinning amiably, scratching the back of his head as he waited the passing of the shell. When he received the shell, he held, tucked in the curve of his little finger, the shell of a land-snail that had been concealed in his frizzy hair. It was stoppered with a tiny plug of wood which he deftly removed, allowing the contents to trickle into the calabash as he lifted his cup, already replenished.

He tossed down the stuff and handed on the cup. The liquid was low and Bachman

held the coconut shell between his knees while he poured the *kawa* into it, his companion insisting upon gaging a fair halving. As Bachman lifted his measure the other took the calabash itself and emptied it, throwing it high into the air.

"No more?" he asked Taku.

"No more."

The three sat there, the eyes of the whites already inflamed by the potent stuff, Taku covering his watchfulness with a yawn. Bachman caught the infection of the grimace and also yawned. So did his mate. Taku turned his next affected yawn into a smile under cover of his hand. Bachman nodded; his head fell on his chest. Within thirty seconds both were snoring stertorously, faces to the sky. Taku rose silently and swiftly, listening.

He knew it was the custom of Weissman's men to feed the cartridges into the spit-fire weapons whenever they were on sentry duty or indeed whenever the devils inside were hungry. This morning he had watched Bachman and the rest fill their magazines. Now their rifles lay beside them and Taku swiftly substituted his own for Bachman's. He took some of the cold victuals laid out ready for the noon meal and slipped off. In the woods he met Weissman and the others half-way to the camp, fell in with them and marched back again.

Weissman walked beside him.

"No use delaying things, Taku," said the white leader. "We can eat as we go. I want to finish this thing and get away before the tide turns."

"Good!" said Taku. Weissman glanced at him. There was something smug in the wizard's accent, something arrogant in his bearing. But he set these down as relative to Taku's war-dress and turned aside to grin slightly as he noticed the pride with which Taku carried his rifle and the awe with which the wizard's men regarded this new emblem of their chief's power and authority.

"Tried to make it spit fire, Taku?" he asked.

"You have not yet shown me the magic," replied Taku. "Show it to me before we go into the fight, Waisimani."

Weissman shook his head.

"I will before we go," he lied. "It might spit before you knew, Taku. There is a very strong devil inside. You might kill one of our own side."

Taku managed to look chagrined.

"But you will teach me before you go?" he pleaded.

They had come into the clearing and Weissman caught sight of his two men asprawl. On the turf there was no sound of steps and the snoring of the pair was distinct. Weissman's face grew black with anger and he leaped toward them, kicking them heavily as they opened stupid eyes. He was a past master of his own style of invective and he did not spare his vocabulary. They blinked as they got to their feet. Taku had carefully judged his drug. It was swift but not long lasting.

Bachman said nothing, nor his mate. It was better to be accused of sleep than of *kawa*, either to Weissman, who would consider that a venial crime, or to their companions, who had not had any and had done the hard work of the morning.

"Go and soak your pig heads in the waterfall," said Weissman contemptuously. "Take along some food, all of you; we are going to attack."

He waited while the drugged drunkards got back some of their senses under the cold gray rush of the fall and viciously booted them into line. Taku watched smugly that Bachman did not think of examining his weapon. And his conviction strengthened that, with Weissman out of the way, these men would be helpless as frightened fish. He patted the breech of his rifle as he marched along, winking sometimes at his own men or thrusting his tongue in his cheek.

Taku the wizard! Taku the heaven-born was coming into his own. There should be no tabu but the tabu of Taku of Talofah, lord of all the islands of the sea.

CHAPTER XXI

VAEGA

AS THERE are some animals which apparently never know fear, fighting to the bitter end, even when trapped, with eyes that hold no panic, only hate and a certain contempt; so there are men who never despair. Upolu, clear-headed and fully conscious of all that had happened for the first time since his arrival in the crater, was fearless in the face of imminent disaster.

All about him his people were dying without the power to retaliate, weak as they were

from lack of food and adequate weapons against the magic of the unfriendly strangers. A few minutes more would see them overwhelmed, enslaved, either to Taku or the whites.

But Upolu was serene. It was not that he lacked imagination. Upolu was a chief, descendant of a race that had handed down much of poetry, a keen sense of the beautiful, a lively belief in a spiritual existence. He had pride of position and he was one hundred per cent. male. All he desired was to go out to the "uttermost darkness," or to the sky-island where his ancestors the gods might welcome him, to whatever fate held, go on his feet and fighting; to make an end fitly.

His first act since the delirium left him was to distribute the food that had been set apart for him. If his illness had left him weak, so were his people weakened by fasting and henceforward they should share alike. Kalani he believed dead. The old man's tale that her love had made so credible appeared to Upolu merely the tattle of a slave and the prattle of senility.

To climb the peaks and descend to the Bay of Lingering Death was a feat that he himself would hardly have attempted. And if she had by some miracle accomplished this, how could she have survived the storm of which evidence was still visible in the crater; how have found a land as uncertain as the fabled land of Kahiki, whence came originally all the tribes?

But the quality of the love of Kalani that had quickened her spirit for such an attempt inspired him also. In some dim way he was conscious of her but he believed it was the attempt of her spirit to comfort him. Soon they would be together as spirits, and then, be it uttermost darkness or island of the gods, all would be well with them.

He was on the crater-rim, standing erect, leaning on a spear held in his left hand, the sennit thong of a war-club about his right wrist, awaiting the upcharge of Weissman and Taku. All about him lay the bodies of his men who had been shot as they attempted to hold back the charge by rolling down the boulders they were hard put to move on account of their weakness. Some others had died in the center of the crater-bowl before they could gain cover from the bullets by crawling into the blowout caves that made the crater-walls spongelike.

The white man's magic had prevailed.

They had scaled the precipice and now five of them occupied a commanding ledge from which they sent the deadly spit-fires. They had stopped firing now. Upolu had forbidden useless exposure. He himself had not been wounded and he knew that this distinction came from no saving grace but from a determination to capture him alive to furnish sport for the conquerors.

He marked the cruel face of Weissman looking up in eager anticipation, and he summoned all his strength to make a good ending. He knew he could not last long, that his wounds would open and that he had not enough blood left in his body for more than a few blows. Weissman was his objective. At the last he meant to grapple with him and let both plunge to their death upon the rocks about the pool of Manoa. He had one advantage of the climbers; he could move to meet the opponent of his choice and tackle him before the rest rushed him.

He looked down the devastated valley in front of him, to the bay where the Summer palace had been and he and Kalani had plighted their troth, to the forest on either side; the sea, green within the lagoon, blue without; and bade it all farewell. Headlands forbade an extended view of the shores; he saw only a slice of the fair kingdom over which he and his love had hoped to rule with love and wisdom, and he turned once to the high peaks back of him, fair in the afternoon sunlight.

He marked the riflemen gathered on a little platform where the ledge widened, resting on their spit-fire weapons. They shouted at him derisively and he quietly turned again to where his enemies were scrambling eagerly up the slope toward him.

Something was moving among the rocks of the rim, writhing along under such cover as could be found, darting with the rapidity of a stone-swift whenever forced to take to a strip of open. There was a shout from the ledge and the riflemen tried hard for the target. On the slope Weissman and Taku halted the advance, fearing the way not yet clear.

Upolu frowned as he saw the dodging figure was that of a girl. As she neared him the firing ceased again and he recognized Vaega. A busy gossip had already told him that Vaega had been tabued by Kalani and that the tabu had been released because she had warned them of the fire.

The full reasons for the tabu he did not know. Kalani had been too proud to tell him and as a chief he did not ask such things from those of lower rank. He was puzzled by the look in her eyes as she reached him and kneeled panting at his feet, holding up a young coconut, the last of their supply.

"Drink, my lord," she said. "It is the end and it is not well to fight the last fight thirsty—nor to die alone. See, it is my own nut that I have saved for you."

Upolu's mood softened. The girl had risked death to bring it to him.

"It was a good thought, Vaega," he said. "But you should not have chanced your life for this. They will not spare you if they find you on the rim."

She had split the nut and now offered it to him. He drank some of the contents gratefully, for his fever was still burning, and then handed her the rest.

"I do not want to be spared," she said. "I, too, can fight."

She stooped and took a weapon, half-sword, half-club, of hardwood stubbed with shark's teeth, from the dead hand of a warrior who had been shot from the cliff. "If I am a woman I can kill a cripple!"

"Taku?" he asked wonderingly.

"Aye, Taku. Then can I die content. Oh, my lord Upolu, this is the end of things. Kalani is surely dead; we too shall die presently. Give me a little of your love for you have long been to me as the sun in heaven."

She clung to his knees as he looked down upon her.

"See, they are half-way up the slope. Take me once in your arms; let us go out into the dark together."

Upolu's gaze grew pitiful.

"That can not be, Vaega," he said. "You can not travel my path for I am heaven-born and on that path Kalani waits. Love that is not born of two souls can not live. I am not your mate. Nor is it good for a maid to die unless her soul finds another to journey with through the darkness. But," he added lamely as he saw her eyes dilate and the soft light in them change to a glare, "it was good of you to bring the nut."

The shouting of the climbing warriors came up to them, midway of the slope. Vaega sprang upright, her weapon poised.

"I hate you," she cried, her savage nature transmuted in the knowledge that she was scorned. She looked the superb young

Amazon as she stood with her club aswing, her firm breasts tumultuous in her passion. "Love? What do you know of love? What does Kalani know of love? Ah-h!"

Around the eastern headland appeared a gray bulk, smoke pouring from its interior, gliding swiftly in the deep waters outside the reef, white foam lifting forward and trailing far behind. All gray it was, gray and menacing, save for two spots of color—one a flag of blue studded with stars—the other a war-cloth of blood-red bands and the same blue-set stars cornered upon it, the war-cloth of the *Merikani*.

Vaega stood rigid, one arm outpointing.

"What did Kalani know of love?"

Her challenge had been answered. Then her catalepsy broke and she collapsed in terror as a bright flare of flame broke out from the body of the sea-monster and, out of a ring of smoke, something went shrieking overhead and battered at the cliff above the crater while a hideous bellowing reverberated along the valleys, echoing the belching wrath of the leviathan.



ABOARD the *Norwich* Lieutenant-Commander Freeman calmly watched the effect of the first sighting shot. Beside him were Kalani, striving to restrain her trembling, trusting they were in time, staring at the crater where the figure of Upolu still stood, midged by the distance, unrecognizable to any eyes but hers, and Treadway, superintendent of the Southern Cross Trading Company.

Through his binoculars Freeman watched the frightened group of five upon the ledge scutter along it, close-crowded for the ladder-timbers. Executive Officer Evans saw them too and so did the range-finders. The *Norwich* was using her lighter battery. The gunners knew of the existence of the little crater and had already placed it, careful not to damage its defenders.

"Stop those fellows from getting down that cliff," ordered Evans. "Oh, good shot!"

Lieutenant-Commander Freeman handed his glasses to Kalani. He had already shown her how to use them when they first picked up the peaks of Talofah. There was no need to alter their focus to her young vision. She trained them swiftly on the figure of Upolu, erect, triumphant, knowing that Kalani had accomplished the impossible, that the gods of the *Merikani* had

answered. Vaega she did not see; the girl was shuddering prostrate, love and hate both temporarily vanished before terror.

Under the impact of the second shot, striking the face of the mountain twenty feet above the ledge and fairly over them, the five men cowered, stunned, while rock fragments dropped among them. The slightest touch to a depressing screw and the third shell struck them, landing on the ledge and spattering their bodies as fat flies are smashed on a wall under the blow of a whisk.

Weissman, intent upon charging the crater, had seen nothing of the swift and silent arrival of the cruiser. The slope hid his view of the ledge but he spun seaward at the whining rush of the shell and saw the smoke drifting from the forward battery. The game was over.

His face convulsed, he whirled on Taku. "You lied, you dog!" he cried and fired.

The bullet from the automatic hit the wizard low, piercing his belly. The shock knocked him down on the side-hill, still clutching his rifle. Weissman strode across and stood over him, emptying the clip of his gun.

"So—there—was—a—way," he said, punctuating each word with a squeeze of the trigger.

Taku jerked as the bullets thudded home. With intentional cruelty Weissman had punctured his intestines. The wizard was a scotched snake but not yet dead. He managed to get the barrel of his spit-fire forward across his chest, groping for the trigger. He had not strength enough to work the lever but Bachman had pumped one cartridge into the firing-chamber.

Weissman laughed and started to kick the gun aside. Taku's twitching finger pressed just as Weissman's instep connected with the barrel, elevating it. The steel-jacketed missile, gas-driven, drove through the German's lower jaw, his palate and his brain, leaving a jagged hole in the top of his skull as it emerged, and Weissman slumped down upon the body of the dying wizard.

And now Upolu's men, headed by their chief, uplifted by the arrival of the *Merikani's* mammoth war-canoe, rushed down upon the men of Taku, their bodies mere envelopes of scanty flesh inflated by the power of their revived spirits. Weissman's

last survivor, bewildered at the sudden turn in events, fired at Upolu, missed and went tumbling down the slope under the thump from the chief's club.

The wizard's followers broke and fled down the burned-out valley, straight into the landing party from the cruiser, which promptly surrounded and interned them while Kalani, racing on, outstripped the rest and caught the reeling figure of Upolu in the strong young arms. The wound in his shoulder had reopened with his efforts and, though he strove to stand, he could not.

The surgeon from the *Norwich* was an efficient one. While Treadway, acting as interpreter, was still questioning the submissive revolutionists, he had Upolu resting easily beneath a palm-leaf shelter on the beach.

He could not talk Kalani's language but he smiled at her, and as she caught the reassuring import of his look she knelt before him, kissed his hand and set it on her head.

"God bless my soul!" said the surgeon. "That's all right, my girl. Get up and look after your lover. He'll be as sound as a fresh mackerel in a day or two. God bless my soul!"

He lifted her and turned away with his eyes wet. Treadway came up.

"Kalani," said the superintendent. "The chief of this great boat of the *Merikani* wishes to talk with you and with your people. But he knows you wish to be alone with Upolu. Therefore he will wait until tomorrow. He is sending food ashore and men who will look out for the peace of the island. Tomorrow there will be a great talk and a great feast."



THE dark settled down, lights broke out on the moored cruiser and a few lights flickered on the shore. Penitent but with hope of pardon, the once fiery bachelors of Taku's train talked in whispers of their own folly and the prestige of Kalani. Talofah was at peace save where, far up in the hills, Vaega, dry-eyed but shaken with her passions, bitter with hate, lay sleepless through the night.

With the first hint of dawn she crept out of her covert and made her way toward the crater-slope. The bodies had not been disposed of and she found the corpse of Weissman lying stiff across that of Taku the

wizard. Lower down the hill was the body of Weissman's follower, brained by Upolu. It lay face up, coatless, arms outflung, head down the slope. Vaega was seeking a weapon among the dead. A sheath-knife was attached to the dead man's belt and the steel had partly slid from the leather. Vaega caught the dull gleam of the metal and she squatted down and drew out the knife. Her lips drew back in a snarling smile as she realized the quality of the blade with its staghorn handle and ran her thumb along the sharp edge.

She moved swiftly among the blackened stumps of trees and came out on a ledge above the ruins of the Summer palace. A fire gleamed low where the practical marines had herded Taku's crestfallen bachelors and two sentries kept night guard. Dawn was beginning to tremble behind the peaks. Very high in the blue a feather of a cloud showed pink among the fading stars. The cruiser lay inert upon the quiet sea outside the reef, its few lights paling.

Directly below her was a freshly erected shelter of woven palm leaves. Vaega's hate told her that this was what she sought. As she looked down the slender figure of Kalani came out of the place where she had kept vigil beside her lover, now sleeping quietly. Kalani was tired but supremely happy. She stretched out her arms toward the cruiser, drinking in deep breaths of the pure morning. Vaega, knife in hand, slid through the ferns that the rivulet had kept green from the flames. She gained the sand and crept stealthily toward the shelter.

Jealousy, hatred, revenge. All three would be satisfied. Since she could not have Upolu, neither should Kalani. He had flouted her. Kalani was triumphant. And both should die.

Kalani turned, intent upon gathering fresh coconuts for Upolu when he should wake—nuts damp and cool with the dew. She saw the skulking figure and with the keen instinct of love knew its import. Vaega flourished her knife and ran at top speed for where Upolu lay defenseless in his sleep. Kalani shouted to warn him—not for aid—and raced in to cut Vaega off. One of the sentries heard the cry and came tearing across the sand, his bayonet leveled at the charge. He was far outdistanced. Vaega had the start but Kalani was the swifter.

The shelter was open at both ends. As Vaega darted under its woven roof, Kalani with a flying leap reached her and caught her left wrist with her own right, swinging her round. Thwarted from killing Upolu, who, stirred by Kalani's call, roused himself on his elbow, still dull from the kindly soporific of the surgeon, Vaega with blazing eyes swung high her arm and brought down the knife, striking at Kalani's bosom.

Up shot the hand of the chiefess and clutched the threatening wrist, forcing Vaega backward from the shelter while Upolu, bandaged and awkward, strove to clear himself from his coverings and the marine, blown with his run, stood undecided as the two girls struggled back and forth.

Vaega's face was the face of a demon, Kalani's filled with confident scorn. She was slighter than the would-be murderer but she bore her slowly back. It was left hand and arm against right but both were practically ambidextrous and their strength was even.

Vaega foamed at the mouth with baffled rage, darted her head forward like a snake and sank her teeth in Kalani's shoulder. Kalani's cold fury flamed and Vaega's right arm began to bend. Slowly down it came, twisting at the elbow, down and back, still gripping the knife.

"Buddy," said the marine to his chum later, "I saw Johnson bend back Jeffries' arm at Reno the same way, inch by inch. This Kalani gets the other dame's arm back to the small of her back, with me dancing round, not knowing whether to butt in or not, fear of hurting the wrong one, savvy? Then just as this Upolu guy comes out of the shed Kalani trips the other neat as Zybysko and sends her to the mat. She gives one yell like a wildcat, and Kalani gets up. This Vaega killer falls on her own knife, see, with the weight of both of 'em to drive it home. I saw the end of the blade sticking out between her breasts and, believe me, if I didn't turn sick as a dog. And this Kalani, after putting up that scrap, after her swimming a hundred miles to send us the wireless—blamed if she don't faint away, all same white woman, with Upolu cuddling her up in his one sound arm and spieling Kanaka love talk. Every one's awake by this and I ducks, not wanting to be kidded. But, take it from me, buddy, it was one prize scrap."

CHAPTER XXII

THE RITUAL OF THE FLAG

IT WAS a day of works and wonders, a day of delights, long to go down in legends and in song; a day of gratitude, of love and feasting and of friendship.

Lieutenant-Commander Freeman—Ferimani the heaven-born was his appellation on Talofah forever after—held council with Treadway and considered many things. The simple faith of the islanders in the emblem of the *Merikani* must, now that it had been so aptly verified, not be allowed to droop, but be fostered.

"It makes a man sit up and think a bit, Treadway," said Freeman.

"The stars are the eyes of the gods,
The gods of the good *Merikani*."

"How did you say it went? About the blood-red bands of friendship? And the rest; wherever that flag may wave, in peace and war, the land knows no oppression and every one gets a fair show. I wish you'd write that out for me. It's the sort of thing for a chap to get under his hat. The real meaning of it. That old sea-captain who first rescued them must have been some scout. We've got to back him up after this war is over. That's our job. Peace without oppression. Funny talk for a fighting man. But we've got to live up to it from this time on.

"Not that we haven't always meant it. By Jove, Treadway, to hear those natives figuring it out like that and believing it absolutely makes a fellow want to clean house."

"Going to annex the island?" asked Treadway.

"I imagine that word is going to have a different meaning in the new dictionaries after the war," said Freeman. "Hang it, man, they are annexed by the blood-red bands of friendship. The flag is planted there already in their hearts. Of course we've put the island on the map and I'll have to make my reports. It's up to the government to decide what to do in the way of a protectorate.

"We don't want to take their island away from them for the sake of a little copra money for some trader who'll teach 'em how to drink gin. That isn't personal to you, old chap; every one knows how the

Southern Cross Company is run. But I figure that the United States is going to do the right thing for its people after this and if these Talofans aren't full blown Americans we haven't got any at home."

"In the mean time you're not quite through raising the blood-red stripes on the backs of the oppressors."

"Not yet," replied Freeman and his fighting jaw showed white through the lean flesh. "Weissman and his kind show what has to be done to that breed of dogs."

"Those who live by the sword shall die by the sword?" suggested Evans, who had just come in.

Freeman nodded.

"I'd give fifty numbers to be in on the real scrap," he said. "A chap has only got to remember a bit to make his blood boil. But this little affair at Talofah has set me to thinking that it's what follows the fighting that counts. Things have changed. To the victors belong the responsibilities instead of the spoils. Swords into plowshares, you know. Or exchange them for policeman's clubs. The U. S. A. has got some job on her hands. Burial party all through, Mr. Evans?"

"Yes, sir. Are you going to make them a speech, Freeman? Like what you've just said? They'll expect it. There's going to be some feast ashore and they'll be looking for it. If we marooned you here they'd make a god of you."

"Not me," answered Freeman. "We want to cut out all this god stuff. Our main job is to be human. I'm no talker. But I'm going to get a spar rigged up for a flagstaff and I'm going to give them a new flag. I'd like to trade it for that old one and take that back to hang in the White House. And we'll have the band ashore to give them the anthem. Sing it to 'em. After that—how long will this feasting take, Treadway?"

"Most all afternoon. You've got to make it ceremonial and observe theirs or it'll break their hearts."

"Good enough. We'll not leave until sundown. We'll teach them the ritual of the flag and have 'Colors' ashore. You might get busy on that flagstaff and hal-yards, Mr. Evans. We'll dress ship. It's worth it. Fancy finding the true spirit of Americanism out here in the Pacific on a fly speck of an island that isn't even on the charts!"



AND so it happened that Talofah saw a naval review in miniature, afloat and ashore. The feast was an interchange of the best the island and the ship afforded. To offset the dances of the islanders the crew drilled and a salute was fired, quite informally, that shook the peaks of Talofah.

Treadway gave one hint to Kalani. Not to supply *kawa*. The *Merikani* did not believe in strong liquors, he said. There were none aboard the great war-canoe.

"Then there shall be none on Talofah," replied Kalani. "*Kawa* is tabu forever."

But there were other things. They talk about that feast in the Navy wherever a man from the cruiser happens to be stationed. The only offset to the dignity was the mass of garlands under which every man was almost smothered; only Talofah did not see it in that light.

When the sun was lowering Kalani sang the song of the flag. And at its finish she brought out the pearls and proffered them to Ferimani the Heaven-Born. Treadway gasped when he saw their luster.

"Tell her," said Ferimani, "that the *Merikani* seek no reward for doing their duty. But, if she will send a gift to the Great Chief of all the *Merikani*, to give me that flag."

As Treadway interpreted, Freeman gave a command and a squad bent on the colors to the newly erected flagstaff.

"This we give in return," said Freeman. "It is to be raised at sunrise and lowered at sunset. Never must its folds be allowed to touch the ground and when it comes down all must stand with reverence, singing the song that we shall sing and that shall be taught to the people of Talofah. I'll get you to bring them a phonograph and the record later, Treadway. You can explain it."

"I will if you'll let me furnish the music," answered Treadway. "I want to do my bit in this somewhere."

The gorgeous flag went up, streaming in the breeze, the sinking sun setting the bars aflame. It was an hour to sunset.

"There's one more thing you can do, commander," said Treadway. "I've suggested it to Kalani and Upolu. They are betrothed, you know. Of course they'll get married Talofan style, but they'd be everlastingly indebted if you'd marry them American fashion. You can, I suppose?"

"Never consulted the regulations on that matter," said Freeman. "But we will. Captain of any ship can perform the ceremony of course, but we've got a chaplain aboard."

And so Upolu and Kalani, wedded according to the "gods of the *Merikani*," marched beneath the uplifted swords of the cruiser's officers while the band of the *Norwich* crashed out a wedding march. Evans tells the story at mess that his commander balked when it came to kissing the bride, but Freeman insists that was because the executive officer tried to usurp his privilege of being the first to claim the privilege.

Slowly the flag came down at last to the strains of "The Star-Spangled Banner," Kalani and Upolu reverently gathering in the folds of their most sacred possession while the islanders followed, in tune and spirit if not in words and present understanding, the voices of the ship's company. Dusk descended and the *Merikani* went off to their ship. Stars glittered above the peaks of Talofah that glowed in the last rays of the sun and then blended with the sky.

Slowly the cruiser gathered way, brilliant with lights, and steamed from the bay, straight out to sea. Kalani and Upolu stood alone on the beach, the reunited tribe gathered behind them, watching the diminishing hull of the cruiser and the departure of their friends, friends who promised to come again or send others in their stead.

It would have been swallowed up in the darkness very soon had not Freeman ordered the searchlights to send back long feelers of light, like the reluctant fingers of friends at parting. And then suddenly, when all was dark and the islanders turning away, there came the faint sound of a mighty cheering, the flare and booming of big guns from the distance, the upshoot of brilliant rockets that rushed up to mock the stars and fell in a golden rain and, so some said, the voice of music hushed by distance.

"It is their last farewell," said Upolu to Kalani; "let us make a sending of our love for them."

And for a few minutes they stood willing the thoughts of their hearts out through the night.

Yet though they were part of it they did not rightly know the reason for that sudden flurry of exaltation. The cause had

come rushing along the air-lanes, through the earth itself, Victory harnessing the invisible and belting the universe with her glad news. This was the message that was caught in the aerials of the cruiser, signed authoritatively.

Germany asks for peace. The Kaiser abdicates.

All round the the world, on sea, by land, there was rejoicing. Aboard the *Norwich*, when the official celebration and display was over, while below decks was still abuzz,

the officers in the wardroom turned to each other with varying emotions on their faces. Lieutenant-Commander Freeman voiced the sentiment.

"It is the end of the war," he said, and his words were tinged with regret.

"And the beginning of peace," said the chaplain. "Peace and good-will on earth toward men."

David Evans, executive officer and poet, said—

"Amen."

For a' That



by **GEORGE L. CATTON**

Author of "Not Yet," "Merely Brute," etc.

THE Brute" stepped on a loose stone and pitched down the hill. When he got up, he sat down again. His leg was broken.

The Brute cursed. Above him piled rock, the boulders and the pebbles and the rubble of shale of the hillside. Below him the river crawled, its rapid current sluggish now, loaded to a snail's pace with rapidly accumulating ice. It was thirty below zero.

The trail was deserted; unless on urgent business no one ever used the river trail. He knew nothing about doctoring a broken leg; knew that it was broken only because the protruding ends of the compound fracture had punctured through the flesh.

His pack had gone into the river in his fall, and sank while he looked for it; and above him, wedged between two boulders, his rifle hung at an unnatural angle, bent useless at the breech,

And before him, winding as the trail

ran to Fairbanks, lay thirty-seven miles. Thirty-seven tortuous, rock-strewn, deserted, lifeless miles!

The Brute cursed again. Behind him, less than five miles behind him, his cabin chimney smoked and there was still a little whisky in the bottle on the shelf and . . .

The Brute's massive jaws snapped shut. His wide nostrils flared. His tiny brown eyes blazed open.

Behind him, less than five miles behind him, his cabin chimney smoked and there was still a little whisky in the bottle on the shelf, but . . .

He dropped forward on his knees and the broad mittened palms of his great horny hands and started to crawl.

It was thirty-seven miles to Fairbanks.

The Brute was just that—a brute. He stood six feet four inches in his bare feet, weighed two hundred and sixty-five pounds stripped, and wore a number six and one-half—only a number six and one-half—hat. He was all body.

And strong! His muscles stood out in huge knots, and the valley of his massive chest was black with hair. But that was all. His eyes were small—tiny, his nose flat and flaring, and his mouth a thick-lipped gap, all out of proportion to the rest of his features. In looks, action and intelligence he was merely an animal.

His name was Ivan Something-or-Other. He had emigrated—fled from Russia. Born into blind ignorance under the heel of autocracy, his tremendous strength and savage temper had been allowed to develop naturally to its vicious maturity—till it got him into trouble.

Siberia was reaching out its tentacles for him when he heard of America and started for the coast. He waylaid a lonely traveler on a midnight road for the necessary rubles to pay his passage to New York.

From New York he drifted across the continent on railroad-construction work and finally shipped north. Shovel-stiffs were needed at the Green Dome Mine on the Forty-Mile River in Alaska, and his great size recommended him. But he got his time-check inside the first month for nearly killing a fellow worker with just his two bare hands.

After that he would work for no one. Back in his native land he had trapped fur from his earliest boyhood and knew the game, and in the Forty-Mile Valley fur was plentiful and brought good prices. He built a cabin and mated with a squaw and settled down.

He was satisfied then. Uneducated, he had never received a day's schooling in his life; unintelligent, there was nothing more than the gleam of the low cunning of the four-footed in his tiny brown eyes; a being of instinct rather than of reason, his animal needs and passions governed his actions and ruled his life; and he could sate those needs and passions.

When he needed meat he killed it where he found it. When he wanted to sleep, there was nothing to wake him. If he didn't feel like working, there was no necessity for work.

And the country and the climate were much like those of his native land and he didn't have to pay taxes. He was contented.

So men called him the Brute. It is only the unthinking animal, the merely brute, who can find perfect contentment.

Then too there were other, more obvious, reasons for that title. His great size and strength and absurdly small head and tiny brown eyes—he looked the brute. His vicious rage when aroused and the unnecessary cruelty he practised in killing his meat—he acted the brute. Even the iron-muscled, low-browed foreign muckers from the mines looked at him, stepped out of the trails to pass him and called him the Brute.

He was the Brute for three years.

He was the Brute when he started for Fairbanks and broke his leg. Till he reached Fairbanks.

But later, when his great hulking body was committed to its last resting-place in consecrated ground, men's eyes were deep and thoughtful, and their heads bared reverently to the winking emerald stars. For Robert Burns was right. A man's a man for a' that.



THE Brute crawled. Hand over hand and knee past knee in a clumsy, lurching shuffle the Brute dragged along the trail.

His mitts were leather-faced and the knees of his trousers and underwear were thick, and protected, while they would last, his flesh from the pebbles and the shale of the going; the affected nerves of his fractured leg, numbed by the shock of the break, failed as yet to register any serious pain; and his great strength was full.

He had slept fourteen consecutive and continuous hours and gorged a heavy meal before he left his cabin. He made five miles in seven hours.

Then he stopped. The long darkness of the arctic night had edged down into the brief day and brought with it a change of weather. The sixty degrees of frost that obtained when he started had lost its grip and a chinook was blowing in from the east. In a few hours, by morning—

The Brute cursed. Three years in that district had taught him the inevitable result of those eastern chinooks. The snow would be deep in the morning. Already the brewing storm was spitting its burden of snow in hissing, whirling, stinging gusts.

He built a fire in a protected angle of the hillside and waited. There was nothing else to do.

Travel at night on that trail in the blind-ing snowdrift of that storm was impossible.

Always tortuous in the extreme, the going was at times but a narrow shelf across the sheer face of a bluff, or a swift and treacherous drop into a lower level. Daylight, or at least a few feet of visibility, was a necessity. He waited.

But he didn't sleep. Even rest was out of the question. Without blankets, he had to keep the fire going; and the drifting snow made that a battle. He was desperately hungry; the work and exertion of his unnatural crawling gait had emptied his stomach. And he had always been a heavy smoker, and his tobacco had gone into the river with his pack. And his leg—his leg was broken.

The affected nerves of that leg had recovered from the numbing shock of the break and the torture of it was almost unbearable. Swelled to twice its natural size and constricted within the tight leg of his underwear and the top of his heavy sock, the increased flow of blood to the affected area, caused by Nature's efforts to repair the injury, was choked off.

The calf from the ankle to the knee was a dull, angry red, mottled here and there with darker patches, patches that were rapidly taking on a bluish tint. And the whole leg from the foot to the hip throbbed with a pulsing, pounding, agonizing beat.

Nor did the cutting away of the sock and the underwear bring any relief. The removal of the constriction came too late.

So the Brute sat and fed the flames and ground his teeth in his agony and waited for daylight. Sat and cursed. Cursed in turn the torture of his leg, the gnawing emptiness of his animal stomach, the loss of his tobacco, his luck. Cursed everything that delayed his rapid progress toward Fairbanks.

Then when daylight again edged up in the south he turned his back on his fire and started again to crawl.

Hand over hand and knee past knee, hand over hand and knee past knee . . . But conditions had changed now. The naked, solidly frozen earth had disappeared. The river, the rocks, brush-heaps and stumps—the whole landscape lay beneath a twelve-inch blanket of snow.

As far as eye could reach in the silent waste the world lay white and cold and

still. Lay dead. The Brute alone moved, lived. And he—he crawled.

Hand over hand and knee past knee, elbow deep in the rasping crystals of the sugar-snow, the foot of the broken leg dragging, the Brute faced south. He knew the trail; having traveled it many times he followed its snow-burdened course by instinct.

Only when he reached the narrow shelves or the steep climbs out of the lower level did his pace slacken; and then on the level again he raced to make up the time he had lost. He was making one mile in two hours, and he knew it. He had yet all of thirty miles before him. And he knew that, too.

Hand over hand and knee past knee, hand over hand and knee past knee . . . He didn't stop when the long darkness again shut down on daylight.

The storm had passed and the sixty degrees of frost had come back, the big emerald stars and the "lights" supplied all the light he needed, and his great strength, those mighty arm and thigh muscles, had not begun to tire. He didn't stop. And that was the beginning of the end.

When daylight came again he was still crawling. His fractured leg, lacking the sock and the underwear that he had cut away, had frozen solid. But he didn't know that.

His knees and the palms of his hands, bare long since to the rasp of the crystal snow, left a trail of red behind him. But he never looked behind him. Fairbanks was ahead of him. He crawled.

The Brute had become an automaton. The agony in his leg, the pain in his bleeding hands and knees, the gnawing in his stomach, everything not immediately concerned with or assisting his forward movement, had long since ceased to be recognized as being.

In his single-track animal's mind he could think of but one thing at a time, could do but one thing at a time, and, like a runaway horse, his forward movement occupied his thoughts to the complete exclusion of everything else. In his mind's eye he could see Fairbanks—that was all. Physical pain was of no consequence. Only one thing mattered now; hand over hand and knee past knee, hand over hand and knee past knee.

Then came the end. Darkness was

again shutting down on daylight when the Brute went down—pitched forward on his face and lay still. He had traveled, crawled on hands and knees with a leg broken, just twenty even miles.

For two hours the Brute lay where he had fallen. Then down the river ice, breaking the Winter trail, came a sled and a team of dogs. They stopped.



THE Brute licked his lips. On his tongue was the taste of brandy, and somewhere close-by men were talking. He tried to raise his head, and failed. Then one of the voices, a peculiar voice, a voice that even in his hazy mind he recognized as that of Doc Adams, singled itself out from the medley and stopped the rest. That voice said:

"Live? Not a chance in the world! Arms frozen to the shoulders and both legs solid to the hips. He won't last an hour."

The Brute tried again to raise his head, and again failed. He was lying on his back on something flat and hard and the dim ceiling above him seemed a very long way away.

And why couldn't he lift his head? Was he the frozen man, the man Doc Adams said couldn't last an hour?

Where was he? That was the next question that found its way into his hazy, muddled thoughts. Somewhere back in his memory he could see himself leaving his cabin and starting for Fairbanks and—

What had he started for Fairbanks for? There was lots of food and tobacco in his cabin, and there was still a little whisky in the bottle on the shelf....

It all came back to him then. With the sudden clearing of his mind in the last desperate effort of his physical body to exist, all that he had gone through in the last two days flashed back into his memory. He had left his cabin and started for Fairbanks and broken his leg and crawled. And crawled and crawled. For what?

The answer came with the end of it all.

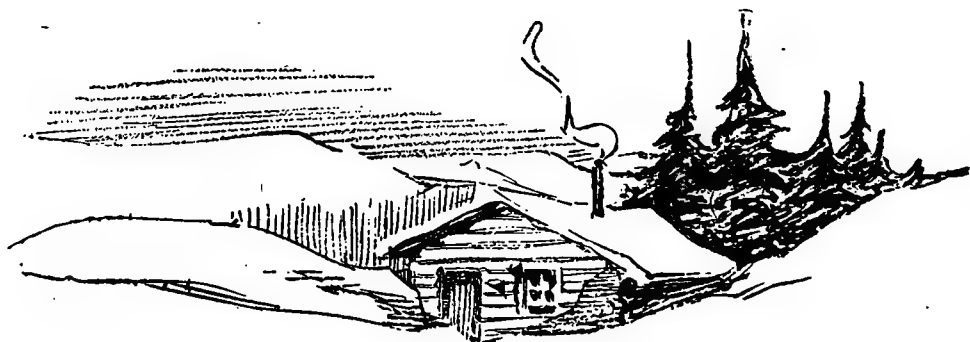
The Brute's dying body heaved, trying to sit up. His ridiculously small head turned sidewise, the tiny brown eyes opened wide.

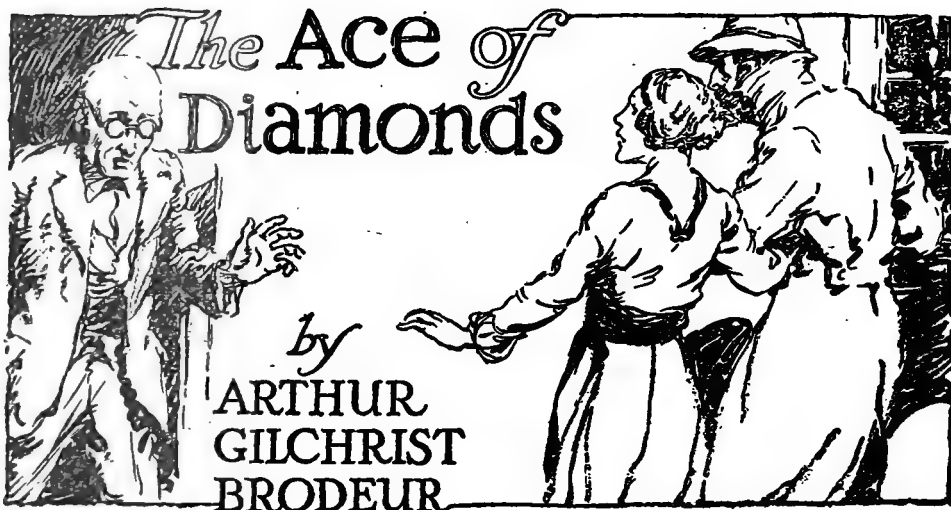
Then his lips moved. With his last breath the Brute, articulating slowly and brokenly, told Doc Adams of Fairbanks—

The Brute, the great hulking giant that men called the Brute, had crawled twenty miles on his hands and knees through the snow with a broken leg and gave up his life to tell Doc Adams of Fairbanks:

"Minnie Martin, doctor—she live two miles by me.... Her....baby, doctor....her baby....baby sick."

So when the great hulking body of the Brute—of Ivan Something-or-Other—was committed to its last resting-place in consecrated ground, men's eyes were deep and thoughtful, and their heads bared reverently to the winking emerald stars.





Author of "The Doom of the Gods."

JIM CLARK turned the latch-key in his own front door for the first time in nine years. Shaking himself like a dog, he spattered the hall with rain-drops.

A heavy Spring downpour was pounding the soaked earth, beating the wide fields on both sides of the house into a sea of mud. Jim's broad shoes were caked with mud—heavy black earth, the rich mold of the Connecticut valley. He had cut across lots in his tramp from the railroad-station.

Twelve o'clock, and the hall and study blazed with light. Frank used to turn in earlier. Jim wondered, with a bitter smile, what Frank would look like now—fat with prosperity, doubtless. His face—it was a boyish, friendly face Jim remembered, frankness itself. No one would have suspected the wells of cunning and deceit and evil selfishness that lay behind it. That face would now be sleek and flushed with high living.

Jim's face was lean and hard, though just now little could be seen of it because of the soggy, down-turned felt hat, the high up-turned overcoat collar and a thick beard. Jim had not been bearded when he went away, nor had his face been hard.

He was glad that Frank was still up. Better to get the row over and done with. Jim had come a long way to get it over and done with and it had taken years to get ready for it. One's love for a kid brother dies hard, even when that brother— But

he must not think of that now or anger would deprive him of his one advantage over Frank: The advantage of a clean, controlled heart.

Swiftly, his footsteps muffled by the hall carpet, Jim strode to the study. The door was slightly ajar. He flung it wide open with a strong gesture, stared and recoiled with a gasp of horror.

In the open space between Frank's desk and the one windowless wall of the study, prone in a pool of blood, Frank lay dead. Crouched beside the body, her back to the door, knelt a woman.

She turned as the door struck the wall, her lovely face white and rigid with fear. There was no recognition in her eyes, but Jim knew instantly the woman he had loved so devotedly nine long years ago, the woman he had refrained from trying to win when he was made to believe that she cared for Frank rather than for him. He had always given way to Frank.

"Edith!" he cried.

His voice rang hollow; horror sat in his eyes.

The woman rose, staring at his muffled face which, hidden as it was, told her nothing. But the voice smote the right chord in her memory.

"Jim," she whispered and moved a step toward him.

What a moment for coming back!

Her movement allowed a ray of light from the wall-bracket to strike between her

and Frank's body. There, in the edge of the pool of blood, lay a long, wide-bladed knife with mother-of-pearl handle. Jim knew that knife at once; he had often seen it on a table in the drawing-room of her father's house, before Edith's marriage to Frank. It was an Austrian hunting-knife that old Whitman, her father, had brought back from Europe in the eighties. He had given it to Edith for a paper-cutter. Its presence on the blood-stained floor between Edith and her murdered husband was startlingly suggestive.

"How did it happen?" he commanded abruptly, his eyes returning to her drawn face.

Her lips parted, fluttered and were still. She swayed, white and trembling.

His voice cut in sharply:

"Stop! Pull yourself together! That's better. Now tell me."

"I—I just came in—just ahead of you. Not five minutes ago. I found him—like this."

It was true, as he could see, that she had not been long in the house, for the hem of her dress was soaked with rain. The waterproof cape she had worn, which had slipped to the floor, glistened with the wet. But the horror need not have taken long and the blood was fresh-spilled. He shuddered.



NOW it was Jim's turn to pull himself together. He reminded himself that he must not judge on surface evidence. That was one great lesson learned from his years of exile. His mind raced back to that day in Singapore, so long ago, when he had picked up an old Boston paper and read on its front page the news, the false news, that made him a nameless wanderer.

Bitterest of all was the memory of his brother's testimony at William Johnson's trial. Frank had falsely sworn that he had seen Jim take the money, that he had tried to stop him and had thereupon been attacked by Johnson. Then, Frank testified, Jim disappeared. False in his life, Frank was capable of false witness even in his death. So the elder brother thought, his eyes fixed on Edith's. He noted with relief that her eyes did not flinch. There was nothing craven in her manner.

At the sight of her and this terrible thing and her resolute bearing up under the weight of it, all his old admiration, his old

love, returned from the tomb where he had thought it buried and rose up to plead for her. The sweet old days, her gentle, innocent girlhood flashed into his memory. She could not have done this thing. Had he been the same simple-hearted boy who walked out of her life nine years ago to leave her preference for Frank untroubled, he would have died rather than doubt her innocence for a moment.

But the merciless years with their disillusion and pain had cured him of simplicity. He had known of women just as gentle who had murdered their husbands. Frank was quite capable of giving her cause enough. Thus the demon of distrust would deal little rapier-thrusts at his strong urge to believe in her guiltlessness. He knew Edith or thought he did. She was quiet and deep and true. Yet what man could really know a woman's heart? Not he who had thought once that this woman's heart was his, only to discover that it was Frank's.

"He was dead when you came in?" he asked.

Edith nodded.

"Where had you been?"

"At my mother's. I went there last night—ran out of the house without speaking to any one. Oh, he—he drove me away, Jim. Not with words or blows—he never struck me—but with—with the way he lived."

Jim had not removed his hat nor lowered the collar of his coat.

"You must get out of this house," he said. "Out of this room anyway. If any one came in—"

Involuntarily he glanced toward the knife.

Her eyes followed his and she shuddered, but she shook her head.

"No one comes here unless Frank sends for him. There is only Mrs. Appleby, anyway—and old Blair."

"Blair?"

Jim knew Mrs. Appleby, who had been housekeeper for Frank and himself, but the name Blair was strange to him.

"Frank's private secretary," Edith informed him, "whom he hired two years ago. He isn't a Fairfield man; he came here from New York."

"Has Frank quarreled with any one recently?" Jim asked.

Edith was trembling again as she answered:

"I don't know, Jim. You'll find out who did it?"

His eyes seemed to bore through hers.

"If I can. But you must get out of here. Some one may come—you can't tell. If you're found here you will be suspected. That knife——"

"Jim!" Her cry was a desperate appeal.

"I don't believe it," he answered slowly, "any more than you believed the things Frank said about me."

His eyes softened momentarily.

"But—oh, Jim! I did believe them—at first. Frank's story rang so true. And I was soon to become his wife. He said——"

"I know. He said he saw me in the bank, saw me with his own eyes, my hands on the money; that he would have caught me if Johnson hadn't jumped for him. He said he struggled with Johnson while I got away, till he managed to knock the bookkeeper unconscious. Oh, well——"

"Then the police came and found Frank bending over Johnson. Frank being president of the bank, a pillar of the church and a godly young man, his word went further than Johnson's—Johnson, who was known to gamble. I read it all in the paper a long time afterward, in Singapore."

Jim's voice grew harsher as his bitter memories mastered him.

"And Johnson—poor devil!—protested his innocence and mine. What chance had he against Frank? And some of the money was found in his pocket. A gambler—people didn't understand why Frank kept a card-playing bookkeeper.

"I changed my name and moved on at once. I was younger then and didn't know what to do. I knew the trust in which Frank was held. I feared his power; I didn't want to come home to a jail. I resolved to return when I was all ready for Frank, as I would be some day, and then I would have things out privately, alone with—him."

His glance swept the corpse. With a change of tone he asked—

"What became of Johnson?"

"He was given five years in prison. We've never heard of him since then."

Jim's lips tightened.

"I'll take oath the poor chap was as innocent as I. But I didn't think you'd believe I was guilty."

A sob rose to Edith's throat.

"Only at first," she protested with great

gentleness. "I had not been married to Frank a month before I was sure he had lied. Oh, I learned to understand Frank!"

"You would," Jim nodded.

He remembered her intelligence, her astuteness. She was not a woman to be long deceived. His hand reached out for hers. It was as cold as ice as he touched it and drew it through his arm, where he let his own lie still upon it.



THEY had but turned toward the door with intent to leave the room, when a hoarse scream petrified their movement. In the doorway, framed against the dimmer glow of the shaded light in the hall, the terrified face of an old man gazed at them, at the dead body, at the knife beside it.

Dropping Edith's hand, Jim advanced toward him with a quick stride, but the old man fled with surprising speed for his seeming years, ran in panic-haste down the hall and out into the rain and the dark.

Jim's pursuit was hopeless. The unwelcome intruder was lost in the night. But his face, as the study-lights had beaten out upon it, was not one to be forgotten. Smooth-shaven, yellow and wrinkled like an old parchment, it was surmounted by a high forehead that ran into a crown as bald as an egg. A pair of large shell-rimmed spectacles bridged a long, straight nose and added to his appearance of terrific fright.

Jim came back to Edith.

"That's what I feared, that some one would come," he said. "Who was it? Do you know?"

Edith still held herself in hand but she was shivering.

"Blair—the secretary," she answered.

"He's scared stiff. He'll go straight to the police. It's a mile to the station-house. Since he's seen you here, it will look bad if you leave now. Go to your room and get into dry clothes. I'll stay here and look things over a bit. I may find out something. I'll get away before the police come. When you need me—need me, not just want me—I'll show up. I don't mean to get arrested if I can help it. When you are questioned tell all you want to, except who I am. Now, go up-stairs."

She walked, none too steadily, to the foot of the stairs and, with the help of the banisters, dragged herself up the long flight to the floor above.

When she was gone Jim Clark, walking wide of the circle of blood that soaked the floor, reached his brother's desk and threw open all the drawers, one after another. For perhaps ten minutes he searched, examining Frank's papers in and on the desk, putting a few into his pocket. Then he ran rapidly through the filing-cases, selected two or three documents and crossed to the windowless wall.

Here book-shelves were arranged in sections with paneling of dark wood between the sections. Feeling about the paneling, he touched a hidden spring. The panel slid back, disclosing a door of solid, close-grained wood about a foot square with a heavy patent spring-lock sunk in the wood.

Tiptoeing swiftly to the door of the room, Jim closed it all but an inch and returned to the cabinet in the wall. It had been his once; here he had kept his personal papers. He had removed his own belongings nine years ago and had left the key in the lock for Frank. Jim knew that to the dead man this place would have seemed safer from prying eyes than even the vault in the bank. If there were anything among Frank's papers that would point to his murderer, it might well be in this cunningly secret cabinet.

He must open that little wooden door. But the key was probably in Frank's pocket. He looked at Frank. No, to touch the dead man was out of the question. Jim could not, even if it were not for the risk of staining his hands and clothes with the accusing blood.

From his own pocket he drew out a thin nail-file and inserted that under the lock of the cabinet. It was not easy to pick such a lock, but he knew how. A skilled burglar whom he had befriended in the Argentine had taught him much of the craft, having no other way to show his gratitude. Soon the bolt slid back and the door opened. The cabinet was empty!

Keenly disappointed, Jim closed the door of the cabinet, which locked automatically, and again searched the desk. Nothing of importance came to his hand. He looked down at the dead man, who lay on his back. The blood welled from a deep wound in one side of his throat just under the jaw-bone. As well as he could, Jim examined the knife without touching it. It lay just within the pool of blood, its pearl-inlaid handle stained to the pommel.

He staggered to his feet, sick and shaken, but, summoning all his determination, he forced himself to go over the room again. Something on the floor under the secret cabinet caught his eye. He stooped and picked up a tiny scrap of cardboard. He looked at it thoughtfully for a moment, was about to drop it again, then hastily but carefully put it in his pocket. Then he tiptoed softly out into the hall, out the front door, and on into the wet street.

Some time must still elapse before the police came. The little town would scarcely have a police auto. When they arrived, such footprints as he might have made on the path and sidewalk would be washed out by the rain, which still poured.



IN HIS hotel room in the city of Cabot fourteen miles away, Jim read the newspaper report of the finding of the coroner's jury. His strong face, clean-shaven now and scored with the lines of hard experience, would scarcely be recognized as that of the handsome boy who had disappeared nine years before. His newly purchased clothes, though ready-made, fitted his lithe body perfectly and neat patent-leather shoes gave the finish to an appearance that would have justified any one in believing him what he claimed to be, a traveling salesman from New York.

As he read the report his eyes gleamed hard. When he had finished he flung the paper to the floor. How cruel the world was—how indecent! After a futile pacing up and down he dropped into a chair and bowed his face in his hands.

In the few days that had passed since he had discovered Edith alone with the murdered body of his brother, he had come to believe more and more unshakably in her innocence. It was because he was so seared by wrong and exile, he told himself, that he had had even a fleeting doubt of her. Now every memory of her gracious girlhood, every recollection of his love, thawed the ice about his lonely heart. He was unaware how sorely his battered soul needed this solace, the tonic of faith in an ideal such as his early, unforgotten, still living love.

The evidence brought out at the inquest was all circumstantial but damningly conclusive. It rested mainly on the testimony of Richard Blair, the murdered man's private secretary, and on that of Mrs. Appleby, the housekeeper.

Blair had given his story straightforwardly, plainly torn between a real sympathy for Frank Clark's wife and his duty to speak the truth. Mrs. Appleby had broken down while testifying, overcome with emotion. She could not believe that a lady like Mrs. Clark—so good, so gentle—would ever, ever do such a terrible thing; could hardly be brought to give her evidence at all and defied all logic and circumstance that pointed the finger of guilt at her loved and esteemed lady.

Frank Clark had been a brute anyway, she declared, who had made his wife's existence miserable. He had been interested in other women. Mrs. Appleby would have been even more distracted and incoherent could she have realized that these protests, by furnishing a motive for the crime, only made the situation worse for Edith.

Rather, they furnished an additional motive, for the police had made a discovery which pointed to a primary motive. Blair, of course, had testified to what he had seen on the night of the murder:

The body of Frank Clark lying in its blood; the knife which Mrs. Clark had used for years as a paper-cutter and had never used in her husband's study—the unmistakable assumption, so regretfully admitted by the witness, being that it was brought there for the purpose of the murder; the accused woman's presence in the room when the crime was discovered; a bearded stranger beside her holding her hand. Blair testified also that when his outcry had attracted the attention of the occupants of the room, the stranger had pursued him out of the house.

The police, it seemed, had been unable to find any one open to suspicion as the unknown accomplice, for Blair could give no description of him except that he wore a dark beard and that his hat and coat collar had concealed his features, which had been partly turned away from the light.

Jim's relief that the secretary had not overheard any of his conversation with Edith was small comfort when he reflected how strongly his presence in the house at all had told against her. That he had been seen holding her hand cast a fearful cloud on her good name. He knew how it would appear, not only to the townfolk but to any jury—a woman holding hands with an unknown man in the very presence of her murdered husband!

Nor was that the worst. Blair testified, and Mrs. Appleby bore him out, that they had heard Mrs. Clark and her husband quarreling loudly in that very study not two hours before the secretary had discovered the murder. And when the police searched the room, with Blair's help, they had discovered that important papers were missing, some of which Blair knew had been in Frank's desk and others in the wall-cabinet. Many papers were gone and, most valuable of all, the dead man's will was stolen.

Blair declared that Frank Clark had kept the will in the wall-cabinet. Blair himself had no key; the only key was supposed to be kept on Frank's key-ring. But the police found it in Mrs. Clark's room, hidden on top of a window cornice, as if a clever police-officer would not look above his eyes for a thing!

The key having been found, the cabinet was opened and searched and nothing was there.

It all hung together convincingly. The story built by the evidence was that Mrs. Clark herself had taken the will from the cabinet, given it and the other missing papers to her accomplice, whom the enterprising reporter held to be her lover, and secreted the key.

The only trace of the strange man with the beard was the mud-stained hall carpet, daubed with two large cakes of loam, each rubbed off from a broad boot. The secretary, the only other man who had entered the house after the murder and before the arrival of the police, wore narrow-toed shoes.



THE Cabot *Eagle* committed itself to the theory that the mysterious stranger was Mrs. Clark's lover and that she had stolen the will at his instigation in order that the entire estate might fall to her. She, of course, planned to marry her accomplice, who had doubtless aided in the murder. This view was strengthened by the nature of the missing will, which Blair had seen.

It provided a legacy of five thousand dollars to Blair; one thousand to the house-keeper; five thousand to Mrs. Clark—of what conduct must the murdered man not have believed his wife guilty to cut her off like this?—and the rest of the estate, over twenty thousand dollars, to Mrs. Ella Johnson, wife of the bookkeeper who had been

imprisoned for the theft of thirty thousand dollars from the Fairfield Bank nine years before. This surprising bequest seemed, to the *Eagle*, to show the splendid, if quixotic, philanthropy of the dead man. In death, as in life, his fellow men were doing honor to the fame of Frank Clark.

As for Edith, in the eyes of the world as reflected in the Cabot *Eagle*, an unlawful love and greed seemed good and sufficient motives for the crime. To Jim these were not motives but slanders of the basest sort. He was in a position to know that the bearded stranger and Mrs. Clark were innocent of the relation charged against them, and Edith had no reason to wish her husband dead that she might have his money. Indeed, far from having married him with any hope of inheriting, she had brought him money, which Jim now suspected had been not her least attraction for his dead brother. He had not thought so nine years ago when brotherly affection and his conviction that Edith preferred Frank started him on his long years of wandering over the earth.

Frank had come to him with a letter from her, a letter expressing pity for Jim and love for Frank. And Jim, heart-broken but loyal, had at once packed his things and taken the night train for Boston, where he shipped for Costa Rica on a United Fruit Company's boat the next morning. He had not seen the papers that morning or he might not have sailed. That very morning the sensational story of the bank robbery was given to a gullible newspaper public, who lapped it up.

But there was still more conclusive evidence of the murder against Edith, evidence that clinched the case. Doctor Mills, the coroner, had called in a finger-print expert, who examined the knife and reported that its handle, under the blood-stains, was slightly filmed with cold-cream in which were finger-prints that tallied exactly with those he had taken of Edith's right hand.

The only shred of evidence in her favor was advanced by her mother. Mrs. Whitman declared that Edith had been with her and not in the Clark house at all at the hour when Blair and the housekeeper swore that she had been quarreling with her husband. This statement, of course, was discounted by the jury. Mrs. Whitman was the mother of the accused and what would a mother not do to save her daughter? But it brought a

momentary gleam of hope to Jim's eyes and a lightening of his heart.

There was just one way to help Edith, he concluded, and he had the way. He believed her innocent and therefore he could give his efforts in her behalf the strength and the conviction which they must have for success. Since he knew she was innocent, he would find the proof of it. He could not fail. So, with merely his faith, he faced the deliberate rejection of all the evidence, flawless though it was, except the mere unsupported word of Edith and her mother.



WITH a mind determined but anxious, Jim Clark set out on a search for some one whom his brother had grossly injured like himself or William Johnson, for the motive of the crime had been revenge, not theft. So much was plain. No valuables in the house had been disturbed. Frank was consummately clever in engineering his evil schemes. He left no open effective way for striking back. Johnson!

His mind would go back to Johnson and the wrong Frank had done him. "Wry-Nosed Bill," his sporting pals called him. His nose had been broken in his high-school days in a game of basket-ball and the doctor in the village where he had lived before coming to Fairfield had let it set awry. But that hadn't kept him from marrying the prettiest and most popular of his classmates—merry, violet-eyed Ella Parker with the golden curls. In fact it had made him a hero. Jim had got the whole story from Mrs. Johnson's lively chatter, though he had met the lady but once. She impressed him as a scatter-brain.

But Johnson was not in Fairfield now, though his wife had never left the town. The *Eagle* said no one had heard of Johnson since he went to prison. There was evidently no clue leading from Johnson to the murder.

Jim strode to his suit-case, opened it and took out the papers he had removed from his brother's study. They were only a handful, nowhere near the number Blair had declared stolen. In fact, these papers had not been enumerated by Blair at all. That was a bit strange, now that he thought of it. But then, Blair probably did not consider them worth mentioning. They revealed little, indeed, except the sordid baseness of Frank's mind.

Nevertheless Jim scrutinized them with concentrated care. They were all he had. They included two letters from Ella Johnson to Frank and their contents fully explained the bequest to her in the stolen will. They expressed the affection of a weak woman with small scruples and thanked Frank for gifts he had purchased for her.

Frank's check-book was the last thing Jim had taken from the desk. He thumbed over the stubs, noting the amount of each, and the entries of purchases, so far as there were any. Several aroused his suspicion:

"J. G. Tait, j. for E., \$225." "McCorkle & White, for E., \$750." "McCorkle & White, E., \$342.56."

"E." might stand for either Ella or Edith. Jim doubted very much, however, that Frank would have spent large sums with out-of-town jewelers and department stores for the wife with whom he was not on good terms. So far as these stubs went, they confirmed the testimony of the letters and pointed to Mrs. Johnson.

Could they lead to Johnson, after all, through the woman who had been Johnson's wife? Jim could not be sure. True, Wry-Nosed Bill had been something of a gambler but with decent instincts on the whole. And would a man murder another in cold blood, or be instrumental in having another man murdered, in revenge for five years in prison and a blight on his reputation? Maybe—hardly. Perhaps Jim was too inclined to be sorry for Johnson, having suffered innocently with him for the same crime.

Ella Johnson? Could the robbery and the fastening of that earlier crime on William Johnson have been part of Frank's campaign for the conquest of Johnson's wife? The thought made Jim hot and sick, but he was forced to admit that such baseness would not have been too much for his brother's gorge—if he had wanted the woman.

Could Johnson have been so depraved in his desire for revenge that he would work through the woman who had been his wife? He might not have been able to if he had been willing. Conceivably, Ella Johnson may have been loyal to Frank—for twenty thousand dollars!

She could scarcely have been induced to steal the will, to suppress the evidence of her own legacy, not even to preserve her good

name, granting there was any left to take thought of. Her sort would sacrifice anything for money. The letters Jim held in his hand would prove her illicit relations with his dead brother—nothing more.

Yes, but if the murderer were Johnson his scheme of revenge may have included the perfidious woman—hence the stealing of the will.

Again Jim held his swirling head in his hands. Even if these wild speculations were true, how was he ever to prove them? There was not a real clue in sight. What real clues there were, were all against Edith.

But he could not let himself be discouraged. He straightened up and drew a sealed envelope from his pocket, tore it open and took out the little shred of cardboard he had picked up from the floor under the cabinet in Frank's study. He had been afraid of losing the trifle and had sealed it up for safety. He held it to the light, pondering what meaning it might have, hardly knowing why it intrigued his interest so keenly. There were buried associations in a back corner of his mind and he felt that they would wake up presently and greet that little triangle of thin pasteboard. It was a tiny triangle with two sides smooth and the angle they formed slightly rounded. The third edge was ragged from the tearing which had separated it from the rest of the card. There was a little red A printed under the angle.

He reversed the scrap, unquestionably the torn corner of a playing-card—the ace of hearts or diamonds. It was impossible to tell which, the corner having been ripped off above the pip. Jim ran one finger along the smooth outer edges. They had been slightly roughened—not worn by use in games but roughened as if from being forced against a hard surface.

Taking a reading-lens from his pocket, Jim looked at the edges through the glass. His eyes brightened with remembered cunning and his lips almost smiled.

What he had detected brought a wave of relief to his heart. In that scrap of playing-card he held a slender clue. It proved to him that Edith told the truth. Yes, ironically, it proved this to him who needed no proof, but he well knew that the mute evidence of the torn card was not enough to prove Edith guiltless to twelve tried men and true in a jury-box.

Still, as Jim looked at his precious bit of

card with shining eyes, he knew that the wall-cabinet had not been opened with a key at all. His burglar friend of the Argentine had revealed to Jim a number of interesting ways of getting on the other side of a lock. Love isn't the only burglar who laughs at locksmiths.

It was true the key had been found in Edith's room, but Edith had had no interest in the contents of the wall-cabinet, though she was the only one who would benefit by the destruction of the will. If the murderer was looking only for revenge, as Jim conceived the case—Good—! Was it only revenge he sought? Was he not also looking for an alibi, for a way to save his own neck? The disappearance of the will would benefit only Edith. Then the paper-knife had been placed beside the corpse by the murderer to cast suspicion upon her.

Having got so far, Jim was stalled. The police would laugh at his theories if he went to them. And they would hold him for the nine-year-old bank robbery he was supposed to have committed with the help of William Johnson and possibly for complicity in his brother's murder as the accomplice of his brother's wife. Perhaps Blair would recognize something about him if he saw him again.

Finally he decided to wait a week more for something—anything—to turn up. But nothing did turn up and at the end of that time he determined on what might prove a futile and dangerous course, a course that might open the prison-gates for him. But it had to be done and this was no time to hesitate further, with Edith already behind those tragic gates.



HE BOARDED the Boston train and rode to the terminal. At Boston he paid a short visit to a hotel near the water-front and engaged in a protracted conversation with the manager. Then he returned to Fairfield, arriving shortly after ten in the evening, and put up at the town's one miserable apology for a hotel.

The night-clerk afforded fair proof of the change the years had wrought in Jim. He was an old man who had lived all his long life in Fairfield and knew every face in town, but he did not recognize Jim, though Jim knew him at once.

The day clerk was a young fellow whom

Jim did not know. After breakfast Jim asked—

"Is the district attorney in town?"

"Yup. Clark murder case. Heard o' that, ain't you? Faraday's the attorney. He's in the court-house now, I expect."

Jim went to the court-house. Edith would be tried at Cabot, the county-seat, but the attorney was naturally in Fairfield at this stage of the case. Jim was glad. He had gone to school with Bill Faraday and Bill had been a fine, likable lad.

Faraday was in conference with the chief of police. Already resolved to declare himself, cost what it might, Jim sent in his name. He was ready for the interview. During the train-trip his thoughts had arranged themselves around the keystone of the torn card.

The district attorney came out faster than Jim could roll a cigaret. Jim held out his hand but Faraday ignored it. A bad beginning but Jim was prepared for rebuffs.

"Do you know your brother's dead?" Faraday asked, his eyes ferreting into Jim's.

"That's what I came to see you about," Jim answered. "I have some information on the case."

"Case is clear enough, thanks. I don't believe you can tell us anything we don't know but I'll give you a chance. When did you get into town?"

"Came in from Boston last night. Just up from Cuba."

"All right. Come inside."

The chief and a plain-clothes man were in the room when Jim and Faraday entered. Jim turned to the attorney.

"I don't mind the chief's hearing," he said, "but I don't want too much company. I've really got fresh evidence that throws a new light on the crime."

"And you just up from Cuba," the attorney remarked with a show of professional acumen. "Chief, this is Jim Clark."

Chief Walsh, a thick-set Irishman with a magnificent red mustache, flashed keen gray eyes at the returned exile.

"The devil, ye say! Here, Gurty, clear out for a while! Too bad ye didn't come back nine years ago, Clark, whin the byes were lookin' for ye."

"Forget that for a moment," Jim retorted. "You've been looking for me for about ten days now and you don't even know it. I'm the bearded stranger Blair saw at the house the night of the murder."

The chief swore softly and reached for the bell on his desk. Faraday's hand closed over it.

"Wait!" he commanded. "I want to get at the bottom of this first. You'll have to revise your story now, Clark. 'Just up from Cuba' won't do."

"I don't need to revise it—only to amplify it. I did come up from Cuba and got here the night of the murder. Since then I've been in Cabot, until yesterday. I know I'm taking a chance in coming here."

"Ye're right ye are!" the chief barked. "Maybe we'll get ye for murder this time. Huntin' for ye and didn't know it, huh? That's all ye know about it. Ye couldn't guess how much we've got on ye."

"Couldn't I?" asked Jim quietly. "Well, here's my try at a guess." He took a deep breath and plunged in. "You've looked through Mrs. Clark's back correspondence, if she's kept any of the letters she got before her marriage. You've asked plenty of questions and pumped all the gossips. You've found out that I was the only man besides my brother whose name was ever coupled with hers. You figure that I might have come back in disguise and been with her the night of the murder. Still, you didn't know for sure but that it was some one else."

"No," the chief grinned, "we didn't know for sure but we waited to see. An' sure enough in ye trot, beard nicely shaved an' all. An' I'll say I wouldn't 'a' known ye. Sure, ye're the only lad that would 'a' been likely to hold the widdy's hand."

"Cut that out!" Jim snapped. "If what you think were true I wouldn't have come near your blasted town!"

"Ye worked it out that we wouldn't expect ye, so ye came. Now ye're here, trot out yer cock-an'-bull story."



JIM turned his back on Walsh and faced Faraday.

"Bill," he began, "you think, like everybody else, that I stole that money nine years ago. I didn't and I can prove I didn't. I was here on the night of the murder and have been in Cabot ever since, till I took a trip to Boston yesterday. While there I looked up the Hotel Atlantic where I stopped the night of the bank robbery. I got the management to look up the back registers for 1910. Fortunately they had kept them. I can produce that register to prove I was in Boston at the very hour my

brother swore I was robbing his bank. As soon as I settled that I came straight here to see you."

The attorney's stern face relaxed a little.

"If you can prove you weren't in on that affair nine years ago it'll help a lot," he said. "It won't establish your innocence of the murder and still leaves you with a possible motive for killing your brother, but it will give you a better character as a witness."

"I expect to be held," Jim answered, "and I am ready. But I want you, out of fairness, to give Mrs. Clark the benefit of the doubt. She had nothing to do with this horror and I have evidence that will shake a lot of the testimony offered at the inquest."

Chief Walsh laughed shortly.

"The Angel Gabriel couldn't shake thot tistamony. But go ahead, bye. Don't tie the knot round your own nick any tighter than ye can help."

"In the first place," Jim went on, "you've made up your minds that the murder was committed with Mrs. Clark's paper-knife, the one that was found beside the body?"

"The one with her finger-marks on it," Faraday shrewdly observed, watching to see the shaft sink home.

"Of course. It looks plausible. Do you remember how the handle of the knife looked? I was there, you know, and saw it."

"Handle all messed up with blood," Faraday recited with an air of patience.

"Must have been plunged in to the hilt." Jim spoke as one who played with the hook.

"Say, watcha givin' us, anyway?" the chief broke in. "Ye're dinged right, it was plunged in to the hilt. Don't try to give us that old stuff about it's bein' too tough a blow for a woman. Mrs. Clark is a strong woman and besides it wint through the soft part of the nick. No bones to stop it."

"But it was plunged in up to the hilt?" Jim persisted.

Faraday nodded.

"Then," Jim shot at him, "why didn't it come out on the other side?"

"Why didn't it what?" gasped Walsh.

"Come clear through Frank's neck? That blade was so long that, if it had been plunged all the way in, it would have stuck out three inches below the other cheek. And there's only one hole—under the left jaw."

The two officers stared at the speaker.

"Why—why, that's right!" Walsh blurted. But Faraday objected:

"The jugular was severed. Blood might have spurted up on to the handle without the blade's going through."

"The jugular was severed with a sharp instrument, wasn't it? Or was it torn?"

"Sharp instrument."

"And that knife of Mrs. Clark's, for all its wide blade, is dull-edged. The edge was ground off it by Mrs. Clark's father when he gave it to her for a paper-knife."

The chief pressed his bell.

"McGuire!" he roared at the policeman who answered. "Get the Clark knife!"

Within five minutes it was on the desk, the chief handling it gingerly.

"Clark's right," he admitted. "It's too long and it's too dull."

Faraday stretched forward over the desk, his face set with suppressed excitement.

"You mean," he asked, "that the murder was committed with another weapon—as broad but shorter and sharper?"

Jim glowed.

"Just that. This knife was put there for a stall—planted, if you like. I'll bet you'll find the real weapon hidden somewhere about the house—maybe thrown down the old well in the back yard."

But Faraday was not easy to convince.

"How about Mrs. Clark's finger-prints on the hilt?" he asked.

"An' how about her quarrel with her husband two hours before the murder?" Walsh grudgingly added.

"I'll answer the chief's question first," Jim said.



BEFORE the surprised officer could interfere, Jim seized the telephone on the desk. Turning the leaves of the directory, he found a number and called—

"107 West."

A ghostly echo of the voice at the other end trickled through the receiver and Jim asked for Mrs. Ella Johnson. A few moments later he was saying:

"Mrs. Johnson? This is the chief of police. Why didn't you tell us, Mrs. Johnson, that it was you who was heard talking with Mr. Clark two hours before the murder? There, there. Keep cool. It's all right. So it was you and not Mrs. Clark? Thought so. No, don't be alarmed. There's nothing to worry about."

He hung up and turned to the attorney.

"I took some papers from Frank's desk—

none that Blair listed as missing, but a few others. I found from the dates of the stubs in Frank's check-book and some letters Mrs. Johnson wrote him, that he was interested in her up to a few days before his death. I believed Mrs. Clark's statement that she was at her mother's home when she was supposed to be quarreling with Frank, so I came to suspect that the woman he had the high words with was Mrs. Johnson. That establishes Mrs. Clark's alibi on the quarrel question and still leaves the testimony of Blair and Mrs. Appleby honest, as I felt sure it was."

"But it leaves the finger-prints on the knife," Faraday interposed, "to prove that she did the murder."

"I thought we were agreed," Jim replied, "that the murder was done with another knife. But never mind. We should still want to account for the finger-prints. They were impressed on a thin smear of cold-cream, according to the newspaper reports. Is that right?"

"Sure." It was Walsh who answered. "An' the will was stolen an' the key to the cabinet was hidden in her room."

"I know. You're married, Faraday?"

"I am. But what——"

"I'll show you. Would a woman of any refinement, as Mrs. Clark undoubtedly is, use a paper-cutter while her fingers are messed with cold-cream? Wouldn't she have clean hands before sitting down to a book or magazine?"

"Would she before going out to commit a murder?" the chief slyly asked.

"A lady will not leave cold-cream all over her fingers whether she's going to cut a throat or go to church," declared Jim Clark. "Am I right, Faraday?"

"I think so," Faraday smiled. "But how did her finger-prints get there?"

"The murderer, before he killed Frank, had worked out a system incriminating some one else. The person to incriminate was Mrs. Clark. It could be proved that Frank was unfaithful to her. It was known to the murderer obviously, though I don't know how, that the loss of the will would bring the entire estate to her and so establish a motive for the murder and the stealing of the will. Therefore he stole her knife, filmed the handle with cold-cream and replaced it where he had found it. She picked it up to use it and naturally left her finger-marks on it. Then, while she was away at

her mother's, the murderer killed Frank with another knife, stole Mrs. Clark's knife again and placed it beside the body, being careful to get it bloody."

Faraday observed:

"There is a difficulty. How could he transport the knife without leaving his own finger-prints on it?"

Jim was ready.

"I've thought of that," he answered. "I don't know how he did it, of course, I only know he did it. He might have carried it with his fingers resting on the edges of the blade near the hilt. He would have left no finger-marks in that way. If he should leave a trace of finger-marks on the edges, they'd never be looked for there. And if he took the knife by the edges near the hilt it would balance well and, with care, could be quickly and safely transported from Mrs. Clark's room up-stairs to the study on the first floor. He might have worn a glove. Or he might have grasped the knife with forceps, or pliers, or a pair of scissors. He could manage it somehow—since he did."

"So you think," was Faraday's reply.

Walsh grinned.

"Or he might 'a' carried it in his teeth," he scoffed. "Ye oughta write detectuv stories, Clark. About the will now. Let's have the nixt chapter."

"Another plant." Jim seemed unaware of the chief's playfulness. "I'll admit that Mrs. Clark is the only person who has a *prima facie* interest in the disappearance of the will. But I deny that she took her husband's key, either before or after the murder, and used it to open the cabinet. I charge that the real murderer planted the key on top of the window-cornice in her room, where it was bound to be discovered, to place the blame on her."

"Go on," growled Walsh, "go on."

"That cabinet wasn't opened with a key," Jim announced.

"Now, come, young feller!" The chief's voice was harsh. "I've examined that lock an' I know it wasn't jimmied or broke open. A key done it."

"It did not! Look here!"

Jim drew from his pocket a plain envelope opened it, withdrew from it a tiny scrap of torn cardboard and placed it on the desk.

"This is what first suggested the solution to me. I found that scrap on the floor just under the cabinet. Feel the outer edges."



THE chief felt and passed the scrap to Faraday, who took the magnifying-glass he used for a watch-charm and scrutinized the sides of the bit of pasteboard.

"Metal might 'a' done that, all right," the chief asserted. "I've heard o' that trick, too. Clark, either ye're a dinged clever detectuv an' Mrs. Clark is innocent, or ye're a sure-fire crook an' the two o' ye's almighty guilty. We'll put ye where the sun won't spile yer complexion till we get to the bottom o' this."

"I haven't finished yet," Jim said. "That job must have been done by some one who had a grudge against Frank. It is clearly a case of revenge, for nothing of material value was stolen. Now I have cause for a grudge against Frank and I may have cooked up this kettle of fish to lead you off the real scent, but I didn't. Who else may have a grudge? Find the man with the grudge who also knows the house, and you have the murderer."

"I've figured that much out for myself," Faraday answered disgustedly. "I didn't accept even the solid evidence we have against Mrs. Clark without looking further. I've known her all my life and so has my wife. Neither one of us would admit she was guilty till we were forced to. And you must acknowledge there are only two conceivable people with a grudge who know the house: Mrs. Clark and you."

"There's Johnson," Jim suggested, not, however, with entire confidence. "Johnson had the grudge. He didn't know the house, that's true, and he isn't around here. Nobody's heard of him, I understand, since he left here for prison. He was as innocent of the bank theft as I. Of that I feel sure. I'm pretty sure Frank himself stole that money and was caught at it by Johnson. Being the stronger man, Frank overpowered Johnson in the fight, planted some of the money in his pocket and framed up that story about Johnson and me."

"Why should he drag you into it?" Faraday interrupted, his eyes intent on Jim's face.

"I know he wanted to get me out of the way." Jim spoke reluctantly. "This is between ourselves unless it's very much needed in the evidence. He thought he'd have a better chance to marry Edith Whitman if I wasn't around. He'd already managed to get me to leave, but if he could discredit my memory, so much the better, and

then I wouldn't be so likely to come back either. But that's got nothing to do with the murder. Still, he did swear to his story in court, didn't he? And you need only wire the Hotel Atlantic in Boston to get proof that I was a hundred miles away when the money was taken."

"The only man who knew the Clark house intimately," Faraday observed, "leaving out you, Clark, is Blair."

"I'm sure Blair is innocent. He's such a good-seeming old man. Still, just because he and I are the only ones who knew the house and Frank with an inside knowledge, I'd like to have him examined in my presence. I might think of something to ask him that hasn't occurred to the rest of you. And then, I want to test him just because we can't afford to leave any stone unturned."

The chief looked at Faraday, who nodded agreement. He then rang his bell. The summons was answered instantly and Chief Walsh was about to send for Blair when Jim interposed:

"Just a minute! I want to have things ready for him when he comes. I've planned this all out carefully."

"Shoot your stuff," said Walsh.

"Send two men for Blair," Jim went on. "Have one take cover while the other calls for him. Tell him only that the district attorney wants to see him for a little while. When he leaves the house have the second man search his room. Where is he staying, by the way?"

"At the hotel, with a dick in the room all the time," the chief answered. "We don't let the star witness get away."

"All right. When Blair comes in have no one in sight but Faraday. Is there a place to hide?"

Walsh swung open the door of a roomy coat closet.

"Good. Got a deck of cards handy?"

Walsh grinned.

"Some o' the byes has, I guess."

He rang again and McGuire demonstrated that some of the boys had. The pack was fairly new. Jim reached out for it, extracted the ace of diamonds and carefully ripped off a piece corresponding with the fragment he had brought from his brother's study.

"Faraday," he said, "when Blair comes in will you be sitting at this desk, playing solitaire? Psychological stuff, you know. When

Blair is announced you get ready to play this ace so the torn corner shows. And take care that he notices it."

"Clever bye!" Walsh was interested. "Ye oughta have my job."

"Sounds like hocus-pocus," Faraday said, only mildly responsive. "Particularly since we're all sure Blair is innocent."

Jim defended himself.

"I have to turn up something somehow. I'm taking a chance on the ace of diamonds; it may have been the ace of hearts the murderer used to open the cabinet."

"If Blair should be the man," Faraday said, catching the fever at last, "he must have opened the cabinet after Frank was dead. He couldn't search it with Frank looking on. The blood was fresh when you arrived. Mrs. Clark had just arrived, she says. Blair reported the murder here at 12:45, so he would hardly have had time to conceal anything he had stolen from the room. And he's been closely watched every minute since—a detective with him night and day. I think he's an honest old man but he may have had a grudge against Frank we know nothing of, or he may know about somebody who did and whom he hasn't yet connected with the crime."

"Exactly," said Jim.

The district attorney was thoughtful.

"I want to see this thing sifted out, Jim. And I want to make doubly sure that Mrs. Clark has justice. But I warn you, if this little play of yours fails, you will have made your own position worse by trying to incriminate an innocent person, and, furthermore, you will have done Mrs. Clark little good."

"I must take the chance," Jim insisted.

"Very well, Walsh," Faraday then said to the chief. "Send two men for Blair at once and dispatch a wire to Hotel Atlantic, Boston. You and Clark will then hide in the closet, with the door just ajar. I'll put this knife in the drawer. Give me those cards."



BLAIR, his simple, honest old face calm with the spirit of the pure in heart, stood facing the district attorney across the desk. Faraday, fussily busy with parallel rows of cards, was just turning one, face up, on the diamond suit.

"Got it, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "Oh, hello, Blair! Just finished a perfect game, Capped the ace of diamonds. See?"

He held up the card, face out, the upper

corner torn off just above the red A. He was smiling but his watchful eyes searched Blair's face. He saw, or thought he saw, just a quiver of the lips, a momentary faltering of the eyes. But then, he told himself, he was looking for something.

"Do you play?" he asked.

Blair shook his head, his face serenely open and candid.

"Never touched 'em in my life, sir."

"Ah! Then you don't know the fun of winning out with the ace. Good old ace of diamonds! Opens all doors!"

This time he was sure Blair blanched.

"By the way," the attorney went on casually, "I think we have that fellow spotted, Blair. The bearded chap, you know, who was with Mrs. Clark when you happened in on them. Ever hear of a man named—Johnson?"

The word leaped from his lips.

Blair's face was unmoved but his voice trembled a little as he replied:

"No, sir. That is, I think I have heard Mr. Clark mention him and I'm sure I've heard of a Mrs. Johnson, but——"

"Don't know the bird himself, eh? Well, we've picked up his tracks."

Faraday had left the scent given him by Jim Clark and was indulging his own man-hunting fancy.

"We've learned where he went when he'd finished his time. And we think——" here Faraday's eyes flashed at the secretary—"we think we've found him."

"Where, sir?" Quite calmly.

"All in good time. You'll learn, by and by. Just thought you might be able to identify him, that's all. No? Well, I'm sorry for that. However, somebody will."

Faraday kept Blair in further conversation until he caught sight in the corridor of the man who had been instructed to search Blair's room. He was just outside the open door. Having accomplished his purpose—the shaking of Blair's confidence—as he thought, he now bade the old man good-by, secretly excited and rapidly slipping over to Jim's views.

When the secretary was half-way down the corridor, Faraday signed the policeman to enter.

"Well?" he asked.

The officer jerked a thumb over his shoulder.

"Funny bird, that," he said. "Don't

know just where he heads in but we've got the goods on him."

At these words Jim, in the closet, felt that he was going to faint.

"Found the will with a bunch of other stuff under his mattress. All he could do with them, with the dick there all the time."

He passed the papers over to Faraday.

"Go back and get him!" the attorney shouted. "Quick!"

Blair returned between two policemen. Faraday had already thumbed over the papers and shut them out of sight in the drawer of the desk. He now stepped to the door, closed it behind the bewildered old man and sprung the lock, noting with satisfaction that it had the same action as the one on the door of the cabinet—a well-advertised patent lock.

"Now, then, Clark!" he called.

Jim and the chief came out of the closet, while a look of consternation swept into Blair's face and then died away. He gazed at Jim as if fascinated.

"Just wanted you to see an interesting experiment," Faraday explained soothingly to Blair. "That door's locked—sprung. Clark hasn't the key. Open it, Clark!"

Without a word Jim reached out to the desk, deliberately and obviously selected the ace of diamonds and inserted the thin, tough edge of the card under the bolt between the door and casing. Then he eased it delicately behind the back of the bolt and pressed gently up and toward him. The bolt slid back; the door opened.

"See?" Faraday said to Blair. "That's the way you opened the cabinet after you'd murdered Frank Clark!"

Blair wilted against the stalwart policeman beside him, but Faraday paid no attention. Swiftly he drew from the desk the documents found in Blair's room, spread them out and began commenting aloud on each:

"Here's the will, Blair! Caught with the goods on! Here's—By gravy! Every one of these letters is written by Ella Johnson to Frank Clark. What was the reason for confiscating them, Blair? To save the lady? Yet you took the will, too, and so were suppressing her legacy. But of course saving your own neck was more important than saving a lady's fortune. Look at this, chief, a letter addressed to William Johnson himself. Here, Sutton, run your hands through his pockets and trot out everything you find."

The policeman diligently went through Blair's pockets. Nothing turned up until he reached the inside pocket of the vest, which gave up three playing-cards, the edges of two badly frayed, the third slightly roughened. This last, one corner torn away, was the ace of diamonds.

Faraday took it from the policeman's hand, placed it on the table and fitted to it the torn-off corner Jim had picked up under the cabinet.

"See!" he exclaimed. "It fits! The very cards he tried on the cabinet lock. William Johnson, *alias* Richard Blair, I charge you with the murder of Frank Clark!"



BLAIR had recovered his nerve. He looked at the district attorney with the air of a harrassed and utterly bewildered man, but one clothed, nevertheless, with the confidence of innocence.

"I'm not Johnson," he announced quietly. "I've done nothing wrong and you can't prove that I have."

The attorney answered serenely.

"We'll prove the case. And this in substance, is the story you'll have to acknowledge in the end. After you were released from prison you camped on Frank Clark's trail for two years. You were so changed that no one recognized you, not even Clark, into whose employ you insinuated yourself. You insinuated yourself also into his confidence—enough for your purposes. You got something on him, then bulldozed him into arranging a legacy for you in his will. After that, in due time, you murdered him.

"But first you sneaked away Mrs. Clark's paper-knife, smeared cold-cream lightly on it and put it back where it belonged, where Mrs. Clark would soon pick it up and use it, leaving her finger-prints on it. You killed Clark with another knife which we haven't found yet—not having looked for it—then you took her knife again—this time marked with her finger-prints—and put it beside the body of the man you had murdered, for the police to find, just as you placed the key you took from Clark's key-ring on the window-cornice in Mrs. Clark's room, to strengthen the murder charge against her.

"But here's the man who found you out—Jim Clark, the honest brother of a bad man. You tell him the rest, Jim."

"You've said it all, Faraday," Jim replied. "But look here, Walsh, Faraday, are

you sure this man is Johnson? He looks nothing like Johnson. I knew Johnson well."

"I am not Johnson," interposed Blair sturdily and promptly.

"Ye don't look like him an' that's Gawd's truth," Chief Walsh admitted. "He looks twenty years older'n Johnson oughta be an' his face is diff'rnt. Johnson was a rosy feller with hair on his head an' a long crooked nose—Wry-Nosed Bill, ye know."

"I'm not Johnson," Blair reiterated. "This is third degree stuff."

Faraday flamed. With a great effort he spoke calmly:

"You've learned your cunning in a hard, thorough school, Johnson, and you had a past master of devilry in Frank Clark. You've had a raw deal, but you've forfeited your right to clemency by handing out a rawer deal."

He turned to the incredulous Walsh:

"He's had one of these face artists fix over his long crooked nose into a long straight one," he said to that officer. "And even when he was nine years younger he wore what hair he had brushed cunningly over the bare place on his crown. I remember once his father came over from Pennsylvania to see him. The old gentleman's pate was bald as a glacier. Runs in the family—eh, Johnson? Doctor Satterlee will tell you, Walsh, that Frank Clark's secretary was a victim of dyspepsia and dyspepsia will get the best of a rosy complexion in time."

"He sure looks old with thim owl glasses an' his yellor skin," Walsh acknowledged, his keen gray eyes still trying to read Johnson in the face of Blair. A darn sight older'n he is. Ye must be forty-odd, Johnson, an' ye look almost sixty. I guess that's what ye wanted to do."

"You'll have a hard time proving your guesses," the prisoner affirmed resolutely.

"Walsh," said Faraday briskly, "will you telephone over to Cabot for Johnson's Bertillion measurements and his finger-prints. Hold on to him, you men."

With a sudden movement the accused man had almost wrested free from his two burly guardsmen.

A messenger-boy appeared in the doorway.

"Telegram for Chief Walsh," he announced.

Walsh ripped open the flimsy envelope.

"Here's Jim Clark's alibi!" he cried out

joyously. "Hotel Atlantic wires he was there on November 12, 1910; registered at 9:03 P. M. Jim, bye, the beers are on this office. Will ye shake hands?"

Jim would and did.

"Now I'll phone for thim Johnson fingerprints," the chief said.

"You needn't!"

It was Johnson, *alias* Blair, who spoke, and the life was all gone from his voice.

"You've got me. I'll enter a plea of guilty of manslaughter. You all know what Frank Clark did to me—railroaded me for the robbery he planned and put through. I caught him at it and he fixed me. Five years I got for it. I was an honest man then. I tell you I gave him just what was coming to him. I'll plead to manslaughter."

"Not much you won't!" Faraday replied harshly. "Not after framing on Mrs. Clark the way you did."

"He didn't spare my wife!"

The great bitterness in the man's voice brought every eye to his face, which was twisting tortuously while the tears poured over the ugly yellow wrinkles of his cheeks.



"I CAN never thank you, Jim."

Jim Clark took Edith's hand in his.

"Please don't try to," he said gently. "I didn't do much anyway. It was the ace of diamonds."

"It was a great thing you did. Mr. Faraday told me that you risked your life for me."

"I did have some fear that the plan would fail. In the bottom of my heart I believed Blair innocent and didn't connect him with Johnson. But to think that Frank didn't know and hired the man!"

"Don't let's talk about it. It's too terrible! Jim, I want to tell you something. In a package of my old letters to Frank—there were only a few—I found one in what looked

enough like my handwriting to deceive any one who wasn't very familiar with it—and with my name signed to it. It said that I cared for him and was distressed because I feared you had come to care for me. Jim, I didn't write that letter."

"Edith!"

"It was an out-and-out forgery. It's hard to say that about a man who, after all, was my husband for nearly nine years. But it's true."

"Then—Edith!"

"Jim, there's no need for pretense between us. Until it was too late I didn't know—couldn't make up my mind which I liked the better—you or Frank. It sounds absurd—perhaps it was. I knew—after my marriage—I had made the wrong choice."

Jim held out his arms to her.

But she withdrew farther into her corner of the sofa, smiling sadly.

"Not just yet, Jim," she said and looked at him with kindly, misty eyes. "I feel so tortured and bruised. And right on the heels of—of the—of Frank's death."

"You're right," Jim admitted regretfully. "I'll go away for a while."

"That is best, I think." She looked at him gratefully. "Jim," she went on, the rose color surging to her cheeks, "I love you."

She found it necessary to raise a restraining hand.

"I told you right out like that so that you may have it to remember while you are away. Can you wait a year before coming back, Jim?"

"A whole year?"

"I think so. We'll say that long, anyway."

Jim is now in Havana where Mrs. Whitman and Edith are to join him in quite a bit less than a year—from today.



Esprit de Corps

by
ROY P.
CHURCHILL



Author of "Substantially Correct," "At the Turn," etc.

MARINE SERGEANT SHEDD, stocky, thick-chested, long-armed, stood before the evenly formed ranks of H Company and called the roll. When it was finished he would lead in the evening's setting-up exercises, and every man in the two ranks knew that when Sergeant Shedd—Wood Shedd, to give him the full name that he was a little tender about—was through with the ten minutes' drill, they would all know they had been somewhere, for Woody tolerated no slack motions and believed that the zipp a marine must have to care for frequent surprising moments was acquired only by a ground-work of steady routine.

At present he was calling the roll, and had reached the C's, "Cahill, Castrau, Cavanaugh," pausing a moment at the last name as if he expected to hear an answer. And then he went on, shooting the names out swiftly from memory, and having them echoed from rumbling base to shrill treble in a string of "Heres."

"Cavanaugh," he repeated, coming back from Zackman in the Z's, and waited imperceptibly in a poignant silence before he made an about-face and marched to the first lieutenant of the company, Dane Hoyt, with his report.

"Cavanaugh absent over leave, sir," he reported. "Rest of H Company present or accounted for."

Hoyt was slender almost to delicacy, with the grace and suppleness of pliant rattan—a whip which drove and dared, caressed and cut.

"Very well," said Hoyt, and returned the salute. "You may go on with the drill." And bending and swaying in an even more perfect rhythm than Wood Shedd could manage, the lieutenant took the full ten minutes of the drill.

"That's it," thought Shedd to himself as he counted off the evolutions. "He's a driver all right, but he drives from the front; never asks a man to do anything but keep up."

"Bert Cavanaugh is a good man, too. It's a darned shame."

This last was almost aloud, for the absence over leave, in a foreign, half-hostile country—a desertion, to be as plain as the records—was a sore spot for the sergeant.

Company H did not believe in desertions. They had lost men, dozens of them, but they lay scattered around the world in out-of-the-way places where law and order had claimed its toll of lives, and their muster roll of such was longer than the sergeant read at drill. But of captures by the enemy and of desertions they had had none.

And now Bert Cavanaugh was gone, and Company H, bearing a wound that cut deep, was saying as little as it could, and hoping despairingly as the days passed that he would be picked up by the shore patrol, or return of his own accord.

Shedd had seen trouble coming for some time and had tried as a good sergeant will to stave the thing off, but in this case his efforts seemed to go for naught.

Cavanaugh had started in well, made the baseball nine, picked up the drill quickly, fitted himself in with a bunch of cronies and

found a side-kicker; and then very slowly like an irritable spreading disease the disaffection grew, for he and Dane Hoyt, the first lieutenant, could not get along, were as incompatible as fire and water.

The trouble fed upon little things—a tone of their voices, an exchange of looks, the choosing of a detail for unpleasant guard duty, the slighting of the spirit of an order—but the main underlying cause was that neither understood the other. They were too far apart in type.

Dane Hoyt had the nervous irritability and the sensitiveness of a thoroughbred. He was high strung, always on edge; while Cavanaugh was deliberate, slow in action and speech, with the stoicism of big-boned, smooth-muscled bulk.

"He prances like a woman," accused Cavanaugh. "I could pull him apart with my two hands, and he stands there giving real men orders like a judge pronouncing sentence."

"You don't know him," defended Wood Shedd. "Don't there have to be sword-blades as well as clubs? Wait until you see him in a fight."

"Let him treat a man less like a performing dog," growled Cavanaugh.

And so the thing went on, growing worse, until after a week of spud-peeling given Cavanaugh by his lieutenant as an answer to a vexing dullness in the receiving of an order, Cavanaugh went ashore for a daylight liberty in San Domingo City and did not return.

Usually the few men who overstayed their leave were turned up the next day by the efficient M. P's on shore duty, but they missed Cavanaugh despite every effort to find him. He had been seen about nightfall in one of the cafés which border the plaza, but after that had disappeared without a trace of his whereabouts. He had been gone two days when Dane Hoyt in one of the *Sitka's* boats and a crew of marines started for their usual morning's work off the mouth of the little river which emptied into the bay.

The river had cut a channel through the rocky cliff on which the city was built, and formed a narrow passage up to a smooth landing-place for small boats and barges from the vessels which anchored in the outer bay, and Lieutenant Hoyt with his detail was making a new map of the estuary. Along the river's edge at the foot of the rock

cliffs, mud and silt brought down from the mountains, and sand washed in from storms outside, gave foot-hold for a thick fringe of bushes and climbing vines covering the sides of the eroded walls, until they met those hanging down from the edge, framing the little river in an almost solid mass of tropical green.



IT WAS low tide, and Hoyt guided the boat a few hundred yards up from the entrance and began to take soundings and samples of the estuary's bottom. These he entered in a note-book and on the rough draft of the map.

They had been there half an hour and Dane Hoyt was moving toward the center of the boat for a better cast near the edge of a partly submerged rock when the cliff reverberated to the sound of a pistol-shot close at hand. Hoyt felt a vicious tug at his side underneath the arm that supported the line, and almost immediately a weight struck his legs from behind as he balanced on the thwart; the boat listed suddenly and he fell awkwardly overboard in a tangle of lines. As he went down he saw a wreath of smoke from half-way up the cliff where it looked as if a steep vine-covered path led down to the water.

Hoyt's first impulse was to swim to shelter by the side of the rock, but shaking the water from his eyes he found the boat's crew in confusion and turned back to them. If it were an ambush he must get his men clear regardless of his almost certain knowledge that the shot had been aimed at him.

As he crawled in over the bow he cut the anchor rope and ordered sharply:

"Take your places, men. Out oars! Give way together!"

Swiftly the little boat ran down to the mouth of the river and out into the bay. There were no more shots, but the bullet which had gone through Hoyt's clothing and seared his side with a red welt had struck the man behind him in a vital place, and it had been he, as he pitched forward, who had upset the lieutenant.

"Minster is done for," said Hoyt after the boat had reached open water and there was time for a hasty examination. "Make all the speed you can for the ship. Get a pair of signal flags out of the boat-box and tell them on the ship what has happened. Have the launch meet us with the doctor.

Have revolvers and ammunition for six men put in."

He began naming the six when the message had been sent and acknowledged, for he knew too well that if he had asked for volunteers every man would offer.

The launch met them before they had made half the distance. The doctor climbed into the pulling boat and began a hopeless battle for Minster's life as the boat moved more slowly toward the ship, while Hoyt and his detail, boarding the launch, sped toward the shore.

"Get in as close as you can without going aground," ordered Hoyt as they entered the river and approached the place from which the shot had come.

He jumped lightly from the bow of the launch to a rock and then ashore dry-shod, while his men followed, some of the less successful getting wet to the middle as they tried to make the leap that Hoyt had seemed to take so easily.

He led them to the foot of the cliff, found the path and started up, examining hastily but carefully every foot of the way, while the men trailed behind, their heavy revolvers ready, hoping for some sign of a lurking enemy—the movement of a bush, or the roll of a loose stone. But the path was deserted and Dane Hoyt found nothing except a beaten-down place in the gravel where a man had stood, and a broken twig which had been pulled aside for a better view.

They climbed on up then to the top of the cliff and to a dusty road which led into the city, and in all the search they found nothing of value. They came back to the ship finally and found that Minster was dead, and that the bullet which killed him was from a forty-five caliber Navy model revolver. It was then that the first thought turned toward Bert Cavanaugh, for Cavanaugh's gun, duly noted and entered against him on the requisition, was gone.

"Why not look the matter in the face, Mr. Hoyt?" said the captain of the *Sitka* when the marine officer was disposed to scout the idea of Cavanaugh's implication. "The shot was fired at you without doubt, for when you fell overboard as if you were hit there were no others, proving that you were the man whoever it was tried to get.

"This man Cavanaugh had a grudge against you. There has been bad feeling between the two of you which you can not deny.

"He has deserted and has taken his gun with him. The bullet is from that type gun. Many a man had been hanged on less evidence.

"You may be right, captain," said Hoyt, "but I can't believe it. Cavanaugh is no particular favorite of mine, but he's not a killer."

"You wait and see," said the captain.



SERGEANT WOOD SHEDD with his years of service and the perfect confidence of his officers had what is known as a free gangway on the *Sitka*. This meant that when his day's duty was over he could come and go practically as he wished.

Now he used this privilege in setting about with renewed determination to find out all he could concerning the disappearance of Bert Cavanaugh and the shot at his first lieutenant, Dane Hoyt.

It had rained the night after the shooting, and getting off at the regular boat-landing the next morning the marine sergeant walked back over the road from the city which bordered the cliff until he reached the path from which the shot had come. Going down the pathway toward the water and trying to reconstruct the scene from what he had heard from the boat's crew, almost immediately he made a find, for part way down an empty brass cartridge-case of the Navy forty-five caliber automatic lay in the path.

Shedd pounced on the small brass cylinder as if it had been gold, made sure of its model and thrust it into his pocket. Then he searched up and down the path for half an hour more, this time on his knees, until farther up the path, just in the edge of the thick grass, he found a small bronze ornament—a world with an anchor—which a marine wears as a cap-device.

When he came back to the ship he turned his find over to Lieutenant Dane Hoyt, who had him explain exactly where he had found both articles.

"The cartridge-case was there as plain as could be, sir," said Wood. "About a third of the way down the path, and I can't understand how it was missed yesterday. The other was farther up, about where the man must have stood, but in the grass."

"This may have been covered up in the dirt," explained the first lieutenant, indicating the empty shell, "as the man

scrambled up the path, and then been washed clear by the rain last night."

The explanation seemed plausible to the sergeant, but this additional evidence pointing toward Bert Cavanaugh did not please him, for he liked Cavanaugh, and the clear record of Company H seemed about to be stained with desertion and murder.

"Have you spoken of these things to any one else?" asked Hoyt.

"No, sir," said the sergeant.

"Don't do it then for the present," said the lieutenant. "I would like to handle this in my own way."

"Yes, sir," said Shedd, "but I don't believe it was Cavanaugh."

The marine officer stood turning the cart-ridge-case in his slim, graceful fingers.

"Why?" he asked, looking at Shedd shrewdly.

"Well, sir," said Shedd slowly, "it's more of a feeling than anything, but there's this. We all know for a sure thing that the shot was aimed at you, and we know what Cavanaugh can do with a gun. He wouldn't have missed."

"Perhaps you are right," said Dane Hoyt, smiling. "Thanks for turning these things up."

That afternoon the crew of the *Sitka* had a sensation and Wood Shedd a shock, for a small launch came alongside, and in the boat was Bert Cavanaugh guarded by a pair of native soldiers in charge of a fussily important official.

They escorted Cavanaugh on board and stood rigidly beside him while the real leader of the party came up the gangway. A middle-aged, swarthy-skinned man so much an Indian that the trace of Spanish blood in him toned down but slightly his heavy angular features. He was dressed in spotless white linen, and removed his cork helmet and bowed low at the approach of the officer of the deck.

"I am Antonio Arata," he said, smiling so that his white, even teeth showed through the sparse-haired, drooping mustache on his thick upper lip. "I wish to see the *capitan*."

"Pardon me a moment," said the officer of the deck, too well trained in the diplomacy of the island to be outdone in politeness, "but I see you have one of our men here. A deserter. Shall we take charge of him?"

"Yes," said Arata; "that is the purpose of my visit."

Bert Cavanaugh was playing the part of

a captured straggler much better than he was conscious of. He was silent and morose, and moved off defiantly as a couple of marine guards took him forward to the brig.

"If you will come with me, sir," said the officer of the deck, turning to Arata, "I will take you to Captain Bennett."

The deck-officer knew who Antonio Arata was, and that he was deep in the political intrigue of the republic. A year before at the beginning of the American occupation a brother of his had tried disastrously to make himself President, but Antonio had cleared his skirts of tangible connection with the fiasco and now lived on his country estate outside the city, content to all appearances with the prosperity which the resumption of normal business and a stable government had brought.

The formalities disposed of, Arata sat in the captain's cabin and grimaced politely over the excellent tea which was offered, while he told his story. Captain Bennett sent a messenger for Dane Hoyt, feeling that the marine lieutenant had a right to know every development of the case.

Hoyt chose a seat in one of the captain's big leather chairs, so that its high back shut off the light from the port, and smoked one cigaret after another while he listened with hardly a word to what Arata had to say.

"I fear that what I have to offer will be of slight value," said Arata. "But such as it is I give it gladly. This man has been inside the boundary of my estate for several days, staying with one of the tenant families; for, much as I desire a strict accounting, they often disobey my orders. Perhaps I should not have yet known of his presence had it not been for a dispute between them."

"And again I ask forgiveness for my tenant. I can assure you that his punishment will not be light."

"He has been a soldier, this man, and so much did he covet the splendid uniform of your marine that for it and his revolver he was willing to feed and shield him. But yesterday my man came and confessed all, for after having eaten of his food and been hidden and cared for his guest seemed to have repented of his bargain, and while my man was at work took part of the uniform and the revolver and disappeared. It was then that my tenant ran to me in a rage and told all."

"But, surprisingly, late in the afternoon the marine returned, and as he slept last

night my man came to me again, asking what he should do; and, taking three men from among my servants, we secured him, but not without a struggle, *señores*, for he proved very strong, and more than once we were near failure."

"Did you get the revolver?" asked Captain Bennett. "The evidence connecting Cavanaugh with the shooting is so largely circumstantial that we wish to make sure of every point."

"Yes," said Arata; "and it was for this that he fought with greatest fury. It was well that we had slipped it from beneath his pillow before he was awakened. Just as we found it, it is in the boat now, *señores*."

Captain Bennett dispatched a messenger and in a few minutes had the revolver. He slipped the cartridges out into his hand, counting them as he did so. One was missing, and the revolver had not been cleaned after firing.

The captain passed the weapon and the handful of cartridges over to Dane Hoyt, who looked at them only a moment before he placed the lot on a little stand at his side.

"That is all, *señores*," said Arata. "It is my wish that what I have told will be of profit, and I beg that the *señores* will not judge me lax by harboring unwittingly this man so long. As soon as he was discovered I lost no time, but sought the help of proper authority to bring him to you."

"We are greatly in your debt," said the captain. "Every fact is of great interest. Perhaps you can help us more."

"As you know, the shooting took place from the cliff along the river, and so far we have been unable to find any one who will admit seeing such a man, a stranger to them very likely, and noticeable, either going to or coming from this spot."

Arata bowed.

"It is indeed possible, *señores*. There are ways that I know, and, alas, my poor countrymen are still afraid and suspicious of *Americanos*."

Captain Bennett again expressed his thanks and appreciation, and Arata bowed himself out, down the gangway and away in his launch.



DANE HOYT did not follow to the deck, but picked up the cartridges which had come from the revolver and examined them painstakingly under the magnifying-lens of the captain's sextant.

Then he took out the empty cartridge-case which Sergeant Shedd had picked up on the path and examined that even more minutely.

Finally he wrapped the cartridge-case and the unused cartridges from the revolver in separate pieces of paper, but put the cap-device in his pocket, and when Captain Bennett returned from seeing Arata off he asked that the evidence be kept in the captain's care, where it would be safe until needed. He did not mention the cap-device.

"Let's hear Cavanaugh's story," Hoyt suggested to the captain. "I'd like to hear what he has to say without his seeing me. If you would be kind enough to let me go into your bathroom with the door open I think we could manage it."

Captain Bennett was willing to humor the young marine officer, especially since the case they were interested in had brought death so close to him the day before.

Cavanaugh, guarded by two marines, was brought in, and Captain Bennett put the questions while Dane Hoyt listened behind closely drawn portières from the little bathroom which opened off the stateroom.

"Now, Cavanaugh," said Captain Bennett not unkindly, "I want you to tell me the straight unvarnished truth of what happened from the time you left the ship until you were brought back."

"Yes, sir," said Cavanaugh. "But some of the things that happened I don't quite understand myself."

"Did you know that Mr. Hoyt, the marine lieutenant, was shot at from the cliff along the river, and that Private George Minster, standing behind him in the boat, was killed?"

"Yes, sir," said Cavanaugh. "I caught that much since I've been on board, but I had nothing to do with it, sir."

"No one has been accused as yet," said Captain Bennett. "You may go on with your story, but I wished to impress upon you the importance of being entirely truthful."

"Yes, sir," said Cavanaugh, plainly somewhat startled at the inference that he might be accused. "I went ashore at the regular time and knocked around town a little. A lot of the boys saw me, just making an ordinary liberty. Then I went to a little café along the plaza where they serve a bottle of red wine with the meal."

"Had you been drinking before?" asked Captain Bennett.

"Not much, sir," said Cavanaugh, and then continued frankly, "but I was not feeling very good about anything. There'd been a good deal of trouble with the first lieutenant of my company, Mr. Hoyt, and I was sore at the whole outfit.

"I was tempted to run away, and if I'd been in a real country maybe I would have. But being ashore and seeing this one made me plumb disgusted with everything.

"After I'd had the last bottle I decided I'd come on back and stick it out. But altogether I shot off my head a good deal, cussing out the country and the Navy and the spiggoty money, and winding up with a few hot ones for the ship and H Company and Mr. Hoyt, and the whole works.

"After I'd got it out of my system I sat back for maybe half an hour and smoked a couple of cigarets until I got hold of myself, and called one of these natives to get me a jitney to bring me down to the dock for the last boat.

"That spig must have got me all wrong, sir, for the first thing I knew I was half a dozen miles out in the country and being brought awake by a fellow with a gun in a funny little uniform. I tried to argue with him, to get him to take me on back to the ship, but all I could get out of him was 'Me no savvy', until I took this jit-driver by the neck and started to climb into the car.

"Three or four more were around me then, and they jumped me, getting me down after a while and tying me up. They've had me in a kind of jail ever since, feeding me pretty good, but not seeming to get the meaning of anything I had to say.

"Then here comes this guy all in white clothes and asks me in good English if I would come along peacefully, which I was mighty glad to do, knowing how far over-time I was.

"That's all, sir, and it's the truth. I'm ashamed of losing my head and blowing off before the spiggoties."



"WELL?" said Captain Bennett when Cavanaugh and his guards had left the stateroom and Lieutenant Dane Hoyt had pushed aside the portières and stepped back into the room.

"Rather fanciful," answered Hoyt. "It will be interesting to see how closely he continues to remember the details."

"The case seems plain enough," said the captain soberly, "motive and all. It's too

bad to have H Company's record fouled with such a thing."

"You know how I feel about that, of course, captain. I'm going to ask a favor."

The marine lieutenant's tone was earnest.

"Anything in reason, Hoyt. But the trial must go on in regular form. I want the majority of the court from other outfits than our own. We can have the two officers living ashore, and a couple more from the *Duncan*, which is due this week. You would wish it that way, I'm sure."

"Certainly," said Hoyt. "All I want is to be appointed as officer counsel for the defense."

"Defense!" exclaimed Captain Bennett.

"Yes," said Hoyt, "with authority to conduct such investigation as I wish."

"Well, yes," agreed Captain Bennett slowly. "Cavanaugh has the right to choose whom he wishes, of course, but I will use my influence to have him select you. It means that you either believe Cavanaugh innocent despite the evidence against him and his poor story or that you are going to make a desperate effort to clear him for the sake of the company."

"Perhaps one as much as the other," smiled Hoyt. "There is one fact I can not get around, captain. It was offered by Sergeant Shedd. You know my personal feeling toward this man Cavanaugh, but if he is innocent neither he nor Company H should suffer.

"Shedd thinks that if Cavanaugh had fired the shot at me he would not have missed. My whole theory rests there as a sort of opening wedge to possibilities. I believe the sergeant is right."

"Too finely drawn," thought Captain Bennett. But he said no more, and Lieutenant Hoyt took Wood Shedd and went ashore.



THE next day's developments were bad for Bert Cavanaugh. Antonio Arata came aboard early and brought with him a native vegetable farmer who had given an American a ride in his cart on the day of the shooting, and who claimed that the American got out near the cliff. Confronted with Cavanaugh in the presence of Hoyt and Captain Bennett, he declared volubly despite much apparent fear that Cavanaugh was the same man.

"He it is, señores! I dared not resist, he with a hand at the gun all the time."

"Where did you learn English?" asked Hoyt quickly.

The man looked confused, glanced appealingly at Arata.

"He has a son, I believe," said Arata, "who attends an American family. He understands little English unless it is spoken very slowly."

"What have you to say, Cavanaugh?" asked Captain Bennett.

"Nothing, sir," answered Cavanaugh. "Only I never laid eyes on this fellow before."

He looked then defiantly at Dane Hoyt, as if he blamed the marine lieutenant for his entire trouble. Hoyt's calm was imperturbable, and Captain Bennett did not miss Bert Cavanaugh's look.

Sergeant Wood Shedd tried his hand at getting additional information from Bert Cavanaugh, but the accused man was difficult and sullen.

"It's some kind of a frame-up," he declared. "That thin-belted wasp, Miss Hoyt—" he persisted in nicknaming Dane Hoyt "Miss"—"is trying to sting me."

"You're wrong, Bert," argued Shedd. "He's working to clear you."

"Tell that to the cook, Woody. He'd like to see me go north with a rope waiting."

"No," said Shedd firmly. "But let's not argue. Is there any little thing you haven't told about? What made you slip your gun ashore anyhow? It's a bad point against you."

"You know how that shore bunch is, Woody. I know it's against orders, but you can't stick your nose up this street or that without some M.P. wanting to see your pass and asking a bunch of fool questions. With the belt on you tell 'em you're on duty, and that's the end of it. I'm not the only one that's done it, wearing it off the ship inside the blouse and outside when we're safe on the beach."

The sergeant nodded understandingly, and Cavanaugh continued:

"I want to ask you something, Woody. How do they figure to hang this thing on me? How did I happen to know all about when Miss Hoyt and the boat-crew was going to be under that cliff so I could get all set and be ready for action? Since when did first lieuts get the habit of making reports to buck privates of what they aimed to do?"

"I'm not accusing you, Bert," said Ser-

geant Shedd, "but 'most everybody on the ship knows Mr. Hoyt had been making a new chart of the river. He's been at it for a week."

"One of the boat's crew was spilling some of it around the galley," said Cavanaugh, "but I didn't listen much. Nothing that bird was doing interested me. I only know he went somewhere for more stalling and grandstanding, likely, but I didn't know where."

"I believe you," said Shedd; "but we can't make a point of it, can we?"

"Guess not," said Cavanaugh. "Looks like they've got me sewed up for fair." And he lapsed into gloomy silence, from which Wood Shedd could get nothing further than sulky yeses and noes and grunts.

But the next day Cavanaugh was in better humor.

"I've thought of something, Woody," he greeted the sergeant. "You'll have to forgive me for yesterday. I'm low, that's all—getting handed this after all the other raw deals. But this here polite spiggoty, now, whose farm I got shanghaied to; I've seen him before, and I'm just able to place him."

"Go on," said Shedd. "This might mean something."

"Well, he drifted into the plaza café the evening I was there. But he didn't stay long. I don't know where he went either. I saw him and then he was gone, but people were coming in and going out all the time. He's not worth shucks for an alibi, is he? But I remember how the boss of the café bowed and scraped and carried on, with '*Si señor,*' faster than if twenty bucks gold had been sprung on him."

"Were any of the other boys with you then?"

"Sure. Jimmie Wyman was there. I saw him passing and called him in. He left after he'd had a couple of beers though. If he'd only stayed half an hour longer we'd have started back to the ship together. He's the one I shot off my head to about Miss Hoyt."

"I'll work on it," promised Wood Shedd, "but don't set your hopes too high. Try to think of something else—the number of the jitney or something like that."

Cavanaugh shook his head rather hopelessly, and Wood Shedd went to report this development to Dane Hoyt. The lieutenant had set him the task of making

Cavanaugh talk, and each conversation in all its detail was faithfully reported.

Cavanaugh had protested stoutly at naming Lieutenant Hoyt as his counsel for defense, and it took all of Wood Shedd's diplomacy and persuasion as well as a word from Captain Bennett to make him finally agree, and when he did so it was with contemptuous indifference to his fate.

"I'll do it for you, Woody," he said finally. "Makes precious little odds anyhow. It's all a frame-up, and my hide is as good as hung out to dry now.

"Miss Hoyt, my counsel for defense! How he must be enjoying himself! But let him go to it. He'd have got me somehow."

"You're wrong, Bert," said Wood Shedd patiently. "He wants to see right done; and then there's the company. He'll try every way he knows to clear you. There's apt to be some surprises before the verdict is reached."

"We'll wait and see," jeered Cavanaugh. "When that stick of conceit does anything more than to get me put away for good I will listen better."



THE court martial charging Bert Cavanaugh with an attempt on the life of Lieutenant Dane Hoyt and the killing of George Minster convened on the *Sitka* and took all the interest of the ship and station. On board the *Sitka* men walked and talked quietly, and when the recess for lunch came tried to worm information from the yeomen who were taking down the testimony in shorthand. All that they could get was that the general specifications of the charges against Cavanaugh were being proven and that the case looked bad for him.

The seven officers constituting the court sat around the dining-table in the ward-room. All but three of them were from the shore station and the supply-vessel which had made port the day before.

Antonio Arata gave his testimony and retired, followed by the native vegetable gardener. A member of the boat's crew told the story of the morning. The Navy revolver and the cartridge found on the cliff path were offered.

The surgeon testified as to the nature of the wound which killed Minster, and of the skin abrasion on Lieutenant Hoyt's side. The bullet was produced and identified as one which fitted the Navy revolver.

Witnesses were called who testified to the bad feeling between Dane Hoyt and Cavanaugh.

James Wyman, private marine, told the court of Cavanaugh's remarks in the Plaza Café the night before the shooting. This evidence was somewhat disappointing to the prosecution, for Wyman could not be shaken from his story and denied positively that Cavanaugh had made threats.

"He seemed to be sore and disgusted," said Wyman. "He said he was being hounded by Lieutenant Hoyt, and that he would do 'most anything to get out of the outfit."

"Do you recall that he said he would 'get' Lieutenant Hoyt?" asked the prosecution.

"He didn't say it, sir," said Wyman.

"But you thought he meant it?"

"I don't know what he meant, sir."

Dane Hoyt, counsel for defense, objected to speculative testimony. The objection was overruled by Captain Bennett.

The prosecution introduced time and place witnesses and the records of the *Sitka* to show the absence of Private Bert Cavanaugh over leave, and read a portion of Naval regulations showing that the sale of a man's uniform while ashore constitutes an intent to desert, and made him a deserter in fact. The law against taking ashore government property such as arms and ammunition while not on duty, and the penalty for selling same, was read.

The prosecution summed up its case briefly. There had been no hitch in the systematic placing of one supporting fact upon another, and the members of the court were plainly impressed.

"This man has broken nearly all the laws constituting good conduct in the Navy," the summary began.

"First, under fancied persecution from his officer he deserted his ship, taking with him a Navy revolver. He became intoxicated in a native saloon, went away into the country and sold his uniform.

"Then, brooding over his condition, compared to the comfortable life aboard ship with men of his own race, and faced with work or starvation, but thinking his refuge secure from discovery, he planned revenge. He knew exactly what the day's duty called for, and lay in ambush until the boat appeared, then fired to kill.

"Believing his aim good for the man he hated, he went back to his hiding-place and

when captured told an entirely unreasonable story. I respectfully recommend that the court fix punishment in keeping with the evident murderous intent of the accused, and with the court's great authority."

Dane Hoyt put Bert Cavanaugh on the stand as his first witness. Cavanaugh was angry, resentful of the whole fabric woven so skilfully about him; and the two marine guards at a sign from Captain Bennett moved closer to him.

"Cavanaugh," said Dane Hoyt quietly, his tone like the soft, deadly touch of a cat's paw, "before you tell your story to the court I want you to answer one question. I want you to weigh it carefully and consider it well before you answer."

Cavanaugh looked at Hoyt rebelliously. This was Lieutenant Hoyt's old rôle of mocking raillery, of languid superiority. It made him writhe, and then as suddenly as if his tormenter had flicked him with a stinging lash came the question, throwing Cavanaugh off his sullen balance, surprising the court to real interest in the answer.

"*Are you guilty?*"

"*No!*" almost shouted Cavanaugh, forgetting the sir, and going on furiously, impressively to the listening court. "You know I'm not! You *all* know I'm not! If I ever took a shot at you I'd empty the gun, and I wouldn't miss!"

"That will do," said the captain severely. "Do not forget yourself again."

The marines moved still closer.

Dane Hoyt leaned back comfortably. He had shown what he wanted, baited the man until he had lost all reserve in his anger, and with the guard down had made him speak. The court could not help but see that, though Cavanaugh hated Dane Hoyt, he would in such a moment of rage be likely to speak the truth.

This was the only question asked by Dane Hoyt, and Cavanaugh, recovering himself, went on with his story. He was more alert now, less resentful, and the court felt him trying hard to overcome his loss of control by a respectful, wide-awake answer to each question, and though the prosecution put him through a nerve-racking cross-examination they failed to make him lose his temper again or to shake any essential detail of his story.

Dane Hoyt was satisfied, but only Captain Bennett, catching a faint half-hidden smile, guessed the skilful maneuver with

which he had changed a poor witness into a good one.



SERGEANT WOOD SHEDD was called.

"Tell the court what experiments you have been helping to conduct," directed Lieutenant Hoyt.

"Yes, sir," said the sergeant. "The afternoon after the shooting Mr. Hoyt took me back to the cliff path. I fired about a dozen shots into the water, standing as nearly as Mr. Hoyt could judge to where the man stood who fired into the boat.

"I used a Navy automatic forty-five caliber revolver, and each one of the cartridge-cases was marked with a cross on the back made with a file. When the recoil threw them out Mr. Hoyt watched where they fell. I moved around to different places to point the gun through the bushes at the water. I fired ten shots altogether out of the marked cartridge-cases, and after each shot we looked until we found the empty shell. We found all ten of them, marked with the file, and one besides which was not marked."

"Let me explain here," said Lieutenant Hoyt, "that I did not believe from the beginning that the cartridge-case found by Sergeant Shedd a third of the way down the path was the one used to fire at me on the morning before. The cartridge-case itself is conclusive evidence, for on examination I found it had not been fired in a revolver at all but held in a vise, the bullet withdrawn, and the cap exploded with some sharp instrument resembling a nail, then smoked inside from the flame of a match.

"This can be easily proven: First, by the lack of abrasions on the brass where it is pushed into a revolver magazine; second comparison of the cartridges exploded by the hammer of Cavanaugh's revolver, and the mark on the cap of this one; third, by the soot which the burning wood left inside, and which does not resemble that left from a fired cartridge.

"When this was plain Sergeant Shedd helped me search for the genuine cartridge, thrown out naturally by the revolver in the brush beside the path, instead of half a dozen steps away in the wrong direction. I have it here, and ask that the court make the same examinations that I made."

When the cartridge-cases had been passed around and the truth of what Dane Hoyt

had explained made evident by the use of a small magnifying-glass he continued.

"What happened, of course, was that the man who fired the shot was so anxious to have the chain of evidence complete against Cavanaugh that he placed, or had placed, the fake cartridge-case on the path. He expected that it would be accepted without question.

"At the same time there was found another object near the cartridge-case, an object which would link this affair to Cavanaugh more conclusively. Sergeant Shedd brought this object to me and to my certain knowledge has not mentioned finding it to any one else, so that only Shedd and myself and the man who lost it or placed it there know of it. This is the object."

Lieutenant Hoyt produced a marine cap-device and placed it beside the cartridge. Captain Bennett started as if he would speak, and Hoyt nodded to him and asked a question.

"I ask, Captain Bennett, if you will repeat to the court what was said to you immediately upon coming aboard by the principal witness against Cavanaugh."

"Certainly," said Captain Bennett. "Señor Arata asked how it would be possible to do less than find Cavanaugh guilty with the evidence against him. His words were, 'Did you find the cap-ornament?'"

"I wish to say also," continued Captain Bennett, "so that no blame can be attached to Lieutenant Hoyt for seeming to keep important evidence hidden, that he told me this morning of the cap-device and asked to be allowed to use it in his way."

"Thank you, captain," said Dane Hoyt, and called James Wyman, the marine who had seen Cavanaugh ashore in the café.

"You have testified that you saw Private Cavanaugh in the Plaza Café?"

"Yes, sir," said Wyman.

"Did you see any one else that you knew or that you have seen since and recognized? Consider carefully. The man I speak of is a native. You have seen him very recently. Did you see him in the Plaza Café on the same night you saw Cavanaugh?"

"Yes, sir," said Wyman. "The man who brought Cavanaugh back aboard the ship was in the café."

"He took a seat behind us on a little balcony not far away and seemed to be listening all the time. Cavanaugh's back

was to him. That was one reason I tried to get him to pipe down."

"When you left the café was this man still there?"

"Yes, sir," said Wyman, and was excused.

"Now, gentlemen," said Dane Hoyt, "I want to put this thing together as I see it. We have two rather unbelievable stories, one told us by Private Cavanaugh and the other by this man Antonio Arata. If anything, Arata's sounds less convincing than Cavanaugh's if we are to consider just the two stories.

"I believe that Arata listened to Cavanaugh in the café, and from the idea it gave, made up this whole scheme to shoot me and have the blame laid on the marine. All his actions since then have been to carry the plan out.

"His worst slip was overzealousness in trying to make the evidence against Cavanaugh overwhelming. He prepared this cartridge-case and took the ornament from Cavanaugh's cap and placed them on the path, not thinking the cartridge-case would be proven false and that the finding of the device would be kept so closely that he would be the first to mention it.

"I have had him watched carefully. There are several important concessions in which he is interested, the decisions on which are pending, and he expected to gain credit for himself by turning in Cavanaugh.

"Also a private grudge, which these people seem never to forget, was an additional motive. He really thought he had hit me when I fell overboard from the boat.

"I was unlucky enough to be mixed up in the last revolution. We rather pinched it out before it was well started, and this man was to be well up in the new government. In fact, his brother was slated for President, and very unfortunately a detail which I commanded had the disagreeable duty of killing him.

"I am going to call Arata for the next witness. He has been detained on board through our purposely delaying his boat, and I ask that the court consider his additional testimony in the light of these developments."



ARATA came promptly and stood a little nervously when the most logical reason for his being called was ignored by the court, for he expected a vote of thanks, congratulations, an

opportunity to hear sentence imposed on Cavanaugh. Instead Lieutenant Dane Hoyt began picking his story into separate details.

"Where were you on Thursday morning near ten o'clock?" asked Hoyt.

"At one of my properties," answered Arata. "This I have already told the *señores*."

"Where is this property? Is it not true that you own land near the scene of the shooting? Was this the property?"

Arata thought a moment. Apparently there was evidence proving this, and he might as well admit it.

"Yes," he said firmly.

"Why did you omit telling the court of this fact?"

Arata shrugged.

"The time of the *señores* is of value. It had no bearing on the case."

"Did you know, Señor Arata," went on Hoyt, his tone becoming suddenly tinged with acid, "that your man Miguel, the one who swore that he took Cavanaugh in his wagon to the cliff, has been under cross-examination since he left the stand, as well as spied on and watched since you first brought him here, and now admits under pressure that this whole story is untrue? That you put what he was to say into his mouth?"

"He dare not," said Arata, showing his teeth and losing some of his poise.

"Nevertheless it is so," said Hoyt, his words quiet, but edged like merciless steel. "And on this evidence and other facts I accuse you of firing the shot which killed George Minster."

"You seem to forget that certain political enemies of yours are as anxious to get the American concessions as you are. You had the cartridge-case and the cap-device from Cavanaugh's uniform placed on the cliff path."

"Your henchman, Miguel, who is not a farmer at all but who was a sergeant in the revolutionary army of your brother, put them there, so that they would be found. You should have done this yourself, Señor Arata, for Miguel told too much a few nights ago to one whom he thought was a comrade, but who instead was a trusted agent of the opposition party to your own."

"Lies! All lies!" interrupted Arata. "For this insult then my boat has been so long kept from my use. I demand immediately to be placed on shore."

"Easy," cautioned Dane Hoyt. "The court at present is considering the guilt or innocence of Private Cavanaugh. But—" and here he turned away from Arata and addressed the court—"I respectfully ask that Señor Arata be held until all the evidence is in."

Captain Bennett at once directed that a marine guard be placed over Arata.

"We have no jurisdiction over this man except as a witness," he told the court, "but as the captain of the *Sitka* I feel it my duty to hold him and to turn him over to the authorities ashore."

Arata was taken away raging and threatening, and Lieutenant Hoyt called Miguel and the man to whom Miguel had talked. Their stories proved the accusations which had been made against Antonio Arata.

"I rest my case here," said Hoyt. "Private Cavanaugh is innocent of every charge that the court has brought against him."

"He did not desert. He did not sell his uniform. He did not fire into the boat."

"Instead he did what few men even in H Company would have done, and that was to try and get back to his ship on time and sober when every sense of justice toward himself had in his mind been violated. I refer to the personal feeling between him and his officer. He overcame that for the sake of his duty. I ask that he be found not guilty of the charges."

The court conferred only a few minutes, and Captain Bennett announced that it was unanimously for acquittal.

"It seems that there are some points which were overlooked in the specifications," he said in conclusion. "For instance, Cavanaugh's violation of the rules in taking his revolver ashore, also in his speaking disrespectfully of his officer in the Plaza Café. Since these actions concern Mr. Hoyt personally the court desires that he make such other charges as he sees fit to cover [them]."

Bert Cavanaugh had listened to the startling developments of the wind-up of the trial with growing wonder as he realized with what zeal Lieutenant Dane Hoyt had worked on shore and on the ship to clear him. His face smoothed out, lost its restrained, hard grimness. Toward the last he followed what Dane Hoyt said as if he were hearing a miracle, with a puzzled, half-reverential eagerness.

Captain Bennett's words brought back a shade of the old repugnance. He looked straight at Dane Hoyt, striving to readjust himself to the critical fault-finding of all his lieutenant did or said, to begin again where he was before the accusation and trial.

Hoyt glanced at him impersonally, almost coldly, and this helped, but what the lieutenant said again swept him away into sincere thankfulness and a clear, new vision of the man who had saved him.

"With the greatest respect for the suggestion of the court," said Dane Hoyt, "I beg that I be allowed to deal with Company H in my own way. I have no further charges against Private Cavanaugh."

"You may go, Cavanaugh," said Captain Bennett. "Return to duty at once. Your record is clear."

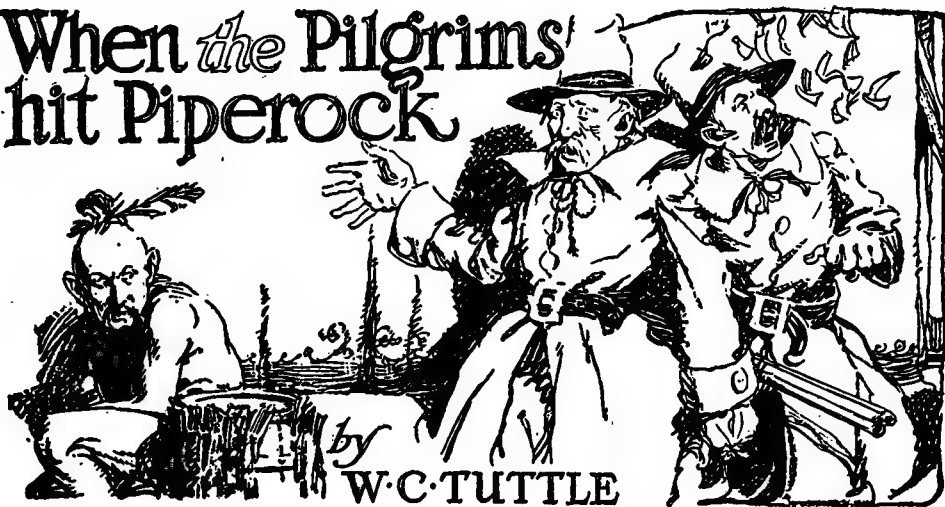
"Thank you," said Cavanaugh, getting

awkwardly to his feet. "I'm going to keep it so, sir."

And while such remarks are out of order in a solemn general court martial the court made no reprimand, for each member saw the man-to-man look and the better understanding of each other as Lieutenant Dane Hoyt and Private Bert Cavanaugh sized each other up anew in a quick, level glance; for the officer had found a solid, nervy, unbreakable fortitude in Cavanaugh's acceptance of the circumstances stacked against him as well as a plea for a new start in his outburst of gratitude; while the man had found in Dane Hoyt's slender, impatient daintiness a manhood as virile as spring steel.

So that in the days which followed, while neither gave up anything essential they found themselves getting on famously.

When *the* Pilgrims hit Piperock



Author of "*Pariahs from Piperock*," "*Another Ace for Ananias*," etc.

I'VE been accused of lots of things. Folks has risen on to their hind legs and orated aloud that I'm a *hombre* who spends his time trying to pierce the blackness of things instead of shedding the scales off my eyes and coming out into the sunlight of optimism.

Maybe I am. I can smell powder-smoke a long ways, and to me there ain't no unloaded guns. Nobody can hurt my feelings by chiding me, and that's the reason that I sets supine and grins at "Magpie" Simp-

kins instead of rising up and smiting him hip and thigh for his insinuations.

"Well," says I when he seems to stop for breath, "you don't need me. I ain't no prize-fighter, gunman nor *matador*, and a feller has got to be all three if he tinkers with the wheels of a Piperock entertainment, Magpie."

"You only sees the horrors and none of the honors, Ike," says he sad-like. "You argues that Piperock has mostly always blowed up somebody in her entertainments, but it's reasonable to suppose that we'll

have one complete success if we keeps at it long enough."

"Yes," says I, "but one lifetime ain't long enough. Why not let Thanksgiving just sort of pass along like any other day? Christopher Columbus wasn't nothing in my every-day life, Magpie."

"What in —— has Columbus got to do with it?" he asked. "He never had nothing to do with Thanksgiving."

"Well, I believe in giving the devil his due, and if it hadn't been for Columbus you'd never have had a Thanksgiving."

"Ike, sometimes you talk like a fool."

"Yes'm. I reckon we all do, Magpie, but I won't act like one. Any old time you speaks to me in a siren's voice—I'm neutral."

"There's only a few of us select ones to take part, Ike. I told Miss Finney that you'd help out."

"That funny-faced school-teacher, Magpie?"

"She's to be pitied, Ike."

"All right, cowboy, I'll pity her; but that don't keep me from giggling when I see her. Still that ain't no reason for you to take the liberty of offering me as a burnt offering at the altar of attraction, though."

"Ain't I told you time and again that I'm all through and tied up for shipment when it comes to helping this here crazy cow-town celebrate anything except its demise?"

"'Dirty Shirt' is going to be asked to help," states Magpie. "The Cross J quartet will likely sing, and Mrs. Smith said she would recite."

"'Curfew Shall Not Ring Tonight'?"

"'Asleep at the Switch.' She recited 'Curfew' early this Spring. This is going to be a regular entertainment, Ike. Miss Finney sure knows things. Says that 'Old Testament' Tilton and Judge Steele are as good Pilgrim Fathers as she ever seen. Likely be a masquerade afterward."

"More likely a funeral," says I. "Always have had and always will have, Magpie. Some of the leading lights will get drunk and——"

"Ah-ha! Just shows where you're wrong, Ike. You've been away so long that you ain't wise to Piperock. Piperock is dry. *Sabe?* No more shall the war-cries sever or the winding rivers be red, Ike. Buck Masterson's is a soft-drink em-porium now."

"My ——!" says I. "Have I come back,

to this? Is everything and everybody dry?"

"Everybody is, Ike. I never did see so many dry folks. To all intents and purposes this here country is plumb dusty, but down deep in her heart she's alcoholic to a startling degree. Even Old Testament has a root-house full of snake-antidote, and before election he was the silv'ry-tongued temperance talker of the world."

"But that ain't going to interfere with the antiseptic attitude of this celebration, Ike. This is the first time we've attempted to celebrate Thanksgiving, and she's going to be worth while. We all feels that Piperock has things to be thankful for."

"Sure has," says I. "After seeing the entertainments she's pulled off in the past I'd rise and orate that this here village ought to offer up thanks every day in the week. She sure is lucky to still be in existence."

"You'll help us, Ike?"

"I have spoken, Magpie."

"I ask you to, Mr. Harper."

"I heard you, Mr. Simpkins."

"Harper!"

"Aw——!"

"Sorrow cometh to all of us at times, Ike."

"You don't need to spit on your hands—I ain't slippery. What do you want me to do?"

"That's better, Ike."

"Uh-huh," says I. "It might be worse."



I GOES down-town and runs across Old Testament and "Scenery" Sims. They greets me like a brother, and I asks 'em to have a shot.

"Shot?" squeaks Scenery. "You mean 'dish,' don't you? There ain't no such a thing as a shot any more, Ike."

"All right," says I. "I'll buy a dish."

We finds Buck behind the bar, washing dishes. He looks at me and I look at him.

"My ——!" says he sad-like. "Look what you came back to, Ike. Ain't it a awful condition of affairs?"

"The extreme end of nothing whittled to a point, Buck," says I.

"Vanilly ice-cream, Buck," says Scenery.

"Make mine vanilly, too, Buck," nods Testament.

"What odor does you desire, Ike?" asks Buck, but I shakes my head.

"None a-tall, Buck. I'll just look on, being as I'm still on the whisky-wagon yet. I don't hand my stummick no perfumed snow-slide. *Sabe?*"

"Got some ras'b'ry juice which ain't so bad," observes Buck, peering under the bar. "Ain't so bad unless you're thirsty or sad."

"Make mine ras'b'ry, Buck," says Scenery.

"Cancel my vanilly, too," says Testament. "I sort of sickens from it. Ras'b'ry sounds sort of regular, Buck."

Buck elects to indulge with us, so we sets around a card-table and sips.

"How," says Scenery, holding up his glass.

"Unanswerable, Scenery," says Buck. "I didn't make it."

"Mm-m-m-m," says Old Testament, licking his lips, "them ras'berries must 'a' stood a while, Buck."

"Picked fresh in Californy. Ain't it good?"

"Yea. Little bitey, but not offensive. Better than vanilly."

"I'm through with vanilly as long as this lasts," states Scenery.

"Funny thing about ice-cream. 'Tombstone' Todd was over in Curlew a few days ago—went over to kill 'Hassayampa' Harris. *Sabe?* Ever so often Tombstone feels that he's called upon to kill Hassayampa. Tombstone wishes to work himself up to a killing mood, but can't seem to find nothing but soft stuff.

"Well, he eats a freezer of ice-cream and then drinks eight quarts of near beer. The more he imbibes the more he feels sorry for Hassayampa. After a while he feels so sorry for Hassayampa that he decides to kill himself and save Hassayampa, thereby making a hero out of himself."

"Did he make good?" asks Buck.

"Nope. The way I figures it is this: When a feller drinks and drinks whisky he gets so drunk he can't hit anything. *Sabe?*

"Well, ain't it reasonable to suppose that when a feller eats and eats ice-cream and drinks and drinks near beer he gets so danged sober that he can't hit anything? Yes, he missed himself. Let's have some more ras'berry juice, Buck."

We had a round on Scenery, one on Testament, and then Buck treats.

"Pro'bishun is a blessing in sheep's clothing," states Testament. "Mine is a wocker. Who wants strong drink?"

"I hears that you've got a root-house full, Testament," says I.

"Tha's calumny, Ike. Shomebody has

bearred false witness against his neighbor. Nossir, it ain't full."

Just then Judge Steele comes in. He nods to us and lays his cane on the bar.

"Masterson," says he, "in the name of the great Jehovah and the Continental Congress, have you anything—anything in the world to drink that showeth any authority whatsoever?"

"There is naught in the statutes that says a man shall not drink of the juice of corn. It sayeth that ye may not make, sell, peddle or portion, but it don't say anything about what a man may absorb into his system if said absorption adopts an alias."

"Such as ras'berry-juice, judge?" asks Buck. "Fresh from Californy?"

"She stingeth like a adder, but feeleth good to a man's insides," adds Testament. "She tempers the wind to the clipped sheep. Ras'berries forever!"

"One and undigestible," says Scenery.

Then one more of Piperock's bright and shining lights trimmed his lamp and got lit up with us. Scenery gets to crying after a while.

"Jus' to think!" he wails. "Jus' to think, gents, that in all of Yaller Rock County there ain't a single ras'b'ry-patch! They won't gro-o-o-o-ow here!"

Then Mrs. Wick Smith comes in to purchase a quart of vanilly ice-cream, and she looks us over sweet-like.

"I told Wicksie that prohibition would be a boon," says she, "and it does my heart good to see you erstwhile drinkers enjoying temperance drinks. The lion and the lamb will lie down together."

We watches her waddle out, and then Buck nods his head.

"They will. Yessir, they sure will—if the ras'berries hold out."

"She called us erstwhile drinkers," says the judge. "Wish I had my dictionary."

"Maybe it's new name for rashb'ry," says Testament. "Maybe it is. Wha's th' difference? I feel like a medder-lark in June."

"You bet you do," grins Buck; "but tomorrow you'll feel like a crow in January. Testament."

Then comes "Mighty" Jones. He looks us over and orders a milk-shake.

"No milk," says Buck. "Not a danged bit of cow-juice, Mighty."

"Never mind," says Mighty. "Leave out the milk. Never did care for the stuff."

"If there ain't no milk there ain't nothing to shake," says Buck.

"All right, Buck—leave out the shake."

"Leavin' out the milk and the shake—nothin' left Mighty."

"All right, all right! Don't start no argument, Buck, I didn't want the — thing noways. I just wanted to show you that I was capable of ordering a drink in these perverted times."

"Come in to enjoy Thanksgiving, Mighty?" I asks.

"Enjoy —! Nobody can enjoy gettin' their insides gummed up with ice-cream or sluicing themselves with per-fumed water. I'm here on business."

"Sellin' goats, cougars, rattlesnakes or wolves?" asks the judge, but Mighty shakes his head.

Mighty is always catching some kind of a varmint and trying to sell it.

"Nope. What does folks usually eat on Thanksgiving, judge?"

"Eat? Hm-m-m-m! Turkeys, I reckon."

"Know where there is any, judge?"

"Nope—not offhanded."

"Must be some around," opines Buck. "Naturally would be."

"Try to find one," grins Mighty, and then he pats himself on the chest. "Look upon me! Mighty Jones the Turkey Baron. I went out to 'Hailstorm' Wilson's place and bought out every bird he owned—and he's the only turkey-raiser in the county. I sure cornered the crop."



"BOUGHT every one he had?" asks Buck awed-like. "Gosh! How many you got, Mighty?"

"Two. Names are Evangeline and Hiawather. Full-blooded turkeys, too."

"Ahem-m-m-m-m-m!"

The old judge stands up and braces himself on the table.

"Mighty Jones, does you stand there and tell us that you has combined together to hold us up for our holiday meat? It ain't legal."

"Evangeline and Hiawather belong to me. *Sabe?* I do as I please."

"M-m-m-m-m. So? How'd you like to be served with a *habeas corpus?*"

"Never drank one, judge. Can you mix one, Buck?"

"Could if I had some lemons, but I ain't. Y' betcha I can mix anything."

"Talking turkey," says I, "how much per pound, Mighty?"

"According to your luck, Ike. Going to raffle 'em off. *Sabe?* Got all the tickets made out. Numbers from one to one hundred on each bird. If you gets number one it costs you a cent, but if you gets number one hundred you pays a dollar.

"For instance, if you get numbers like twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two or twenty-three you pays twenty cents; but from there up to and including twenty-seven you pays two bits. See the idea?"

"Well," says Buck, "I ain't never been to school enough to make me a figure-hound, but my natural instinct seems to tell me that you ain't going to lose money, Mighty."

"You made a decent profit on your hqoch, Buck."

"Nothing like that, Mighty."

"No? You been in business here for years and years, Buck. You started in with one barrel of hooch, and you never got her empty. That ain't so bad when you figures that we didn't drink anything else."

"Speaking of turkeys reminds me of Miss Finney," states the judge.

"You let up on that!" snaps Mighty. "I've got a danged nice-looking pair of birds, judge."

"I ain't making physical comparisons," says the judge. "At the celebration to-morrow night, which is to all intents and purposes the night before Thanksgiving, we aims to produce a tableau symbolic of the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers.

"She depicts a far-distant day, gents; a day that none of us can remember. It was in them times that turkeys became the desired food, and through the ages we has hankered for them on that day and date.

"Miss Finney says we must surely have turkeys in the tableau, being as them birds helps make it symbolic, but if there ain't no turkeys to be had—well, the tableau sort of loses prestige. What does you think, Mighty?"

"I think she'll fail, judge, if you needs turkeys, 'cause I hereby states at the top of my voice: Evangeline and Hiawather shall never appear on any stage. I bought turkeys, judge—not actors."

"Hol' on, Mighty!" says the judge, getting red around the eyes. "Don't render no decision until the evidence is all in. You wishes to raffle them birds? All right. Suppose Piperock gets peeved at you for being

unpatriotic? Suppose they boycotts your old raffle?

"Unless you cometh forth with them birds I shall agitate against all raffles. I'll get out a injunction against you, and then where would you be?"

"Likely in jail for killing you!" snaps Mighty. "Injunction? On what grounds, judge? They're my birds, ain't they? Go ahead and agitate. I'll bar the door and eat 'em myself. *Sabe?*"

Mighty yanks himself from our presence, and the judge turns to Testament.

"Well, what do you think about it?"

The old sky-pilot sort of jerks and then sets his hat on straight.

"What shay?"

"I asked you what you thought of it."

"Good. Ve-e-e-ry good. Any left, Buck?"

The sheriff still slept.

 I FOUND Magpie with his long nose buried in a book. After a while he shuts the book and rolls a cigaret.

"Ike, they was a doughty crew," says he. "Dog-gone doughty."

"No doubty," says I, "Where did they hail from?"

"England, of course. Where did you think they hailed from?"

"Missouri, Mexico—lots of places on the earth, Magpie."

"They braved the tempest and the wave. Ike—remember that."

"I'll tie a string around my trigger-finger. Go ahead."

"In 1620 they landed on a Plymouth Rock."

"Chicken-thieves!"

I ducked just in time and went out to feed my bronc. It was a danged unintelligent conversation to me, but Magpie understood enough of it to get mad at me.

Magpie's a smart *hombre*. He sure does love a book, and he thinks we all ought to know things. I'm going to get me a book some day. I had one once called "The Revelations of the Countess." It was a good book, but she wore out.

That night I am met by Magpie and Dirty Shirt, and they insists that I go with them. I asks Dirty why I am wanted, and he says—

"Misery likes company."

They takes me up into the Mint Hall, and I meets Piperock's star entertainers. There's

Wick Smith, Old Testament, Judge Steele, Pete Gonyer, "Ricky" Henderson, Scenery Sims, Mrs. Smith, Miss Finney, and Clementine Smith, a niece of "Doughgod" Smith.

Judge Steele seems to have the floor—as usual. Old Testament seems to be swallowing hard, and the medder-lark seems to have left his system. Scenery look a heap like he was observing the horrors of Death Valley, too.

"Ike," says the judge, "you *sabe* the reason you're up here?"

"One on each side of me, judge," says I. "Ahem-m-m-m-m! You know why we celebrates Thanksgiving?"

"Because you ain't got brains enough to let well enough alone."

"Celebrating in Piperock is like thawing dynamite in the oven. You dog-gone, buzzard-headed——"

"Whoa!" howls Magpie. "Your cinch is slipping, Ike!"

The ladies look shocked, but the judge keeps right on talking.

"Thanksgiving was started in 1620. *Sabe?*"

"And ended the year I was born, as far as I'm concerned," says I. "I've got along all these years without it, and I sure ain't missed it none to speak about. If she was started in 1620, folks, I figure we ought to let her lay off for a while."

"Gracious, that is a queer view-point," says Miss Finney.

"Ma'am," says I, "you don't know Piperock like I do. I had a view-point once, but Piperock entertainments has bumped into it until she's plumb flat on the end."

"I fear you are a pessimist, Mr. Harper," says Clementine.

"No, ma'am. I'm educated—that's all."

"Now that recitation of mine," says Mrs. Smith; "I ain't learned it by heart yet, but I'll read it to you. I think it's the most touching thing Muley Bowles ever wrote."

She waddles to the platform, and reads it to us.

"It was a dewy morn in Spring;
The birds were flying high;
I thought of one I loved so well;
A tear stood in my eye.

I wandered down among the trees
Where I plighted her my love.
The tear-drop trickled down my cheek,
The birds flew up above.

The tree where we had cut our names,
Where I swore I'd love her best.
The birds flew higher in the sky;
A tear fell on my chest.

Oh, bitter day! Oh, bitter day!
A sad, sad day, but sweet.
The bitter tears roll off my chest—
Roll off and wet my feet."

Mrs. Smith pants that much and then wipes away her tears. Maybe she was afraid she'd get her feet wet.

"Don't you think it's wonderful?" she asks.

"Rare," says I. "If I had it I'd take it to a taxidermist or have it pickled."

"I like 'Asleep at the Switch' better," says Wick.

"Yes, you would," says Mrs. Smith. "You like anything with the word 'sleep' in it, Wicksie."

"Well, folks, we might as well get to work on that tableau," states Miss Finney. I seen a face like hers once. It was near the top of a totem-pole in Seattle.

We all trails up on the stage. She shoves Old Testament out near the front.

"Now," says she, "look dignified, Dr. Tilton, and pose like you had a book under your arm. Yes, like that. You will have a gun in your other hand."

"Don't give me no book," says I. "I'll take two guns."

"Shut up!" snaps Magpie. "Miss Finney knows what she's doing."

"Like —! If she did she wouldn't give that old pelican a gun."

Miss Finney don't pay no attention to me. She lines Mrs. Smith up with Testament, and then comes Magpie, Clementine and Judge Steele. She walks all around them and acts pleased.

"Really you look the part already. Don't you think so, Mr. Harper?"

"Yes," says I, "they sure do. What part are you talking about?"

"Ike, you're a danged fool!" snaps Magpie.

"Now," says Miss Finney, "I will place Mr. Harper, Mr. Jones and Mr. Smith. The three of you will crouch down behind these boxes looking as fierce as you can. Remember, these people are your enemies."

"Yes'm," says I. "That won't require no acting on my part. What are we bushwhackers supposed to be?"

"You three will represent Indians. Indians hiding from the Pilgrims."

"From that bunch?" asks Dirty Shirt. "Hide from them? Not me!"

"Yes!" snaps Magpie. "Hiding—behind—a—stump. *Sabe?*"

"Oh!" grunts Dirty. "Oh, behind a stump. All right. The Injuns never did get a square deal."

Then the three of us humps over behind them boxes. I reckon we looked as much like Injuns as them boxes did like stumps.

"Fine!" says Miss Finney. "Just fine. When we get the costumes on and Mr. Goyner up there in the rafters sifting snow upon us it will be very realistic. Dr. Tilton will recite the story of the first Thanksgiving Day, which I have written for him."

"To begin with, there will be nobody on the stage except the three Indians. They will be talking in gutturals."

"Suddenly one of them will hear the tolling of a bell. He will peer into the distance and see the Pilgrims coming from church."

"The three Indians will dash to shelter behind the stumps. While I slowly toll the bell behind the scenes you Pilgrims Fathers and Mothers will slowly advance to your places before the audience."

"That is all. Isn't it simple?"

"Yes," says I. "Too danged simple."

"Miss Finney and I are working on the costumes," states Mrs. Smith. "Miss Finney will give Mr. Simpkins some pictures showing the proper costume for Indians of that age. He will be responsible for accuracy of detail."

"This will be all for this evening," says Miss Finney. "Everybody will please be on hand early tomorrow evening so the costumes may be properly adjusted. Good evening."



I STARTS to walk down to the door when Magpie grabs me by the arm.

"Miss Finney wants you to take her home, Ike."

"What's the matter with her? Can't she walk?"

"Sh-h-h-h-h! She wants to talk with you about something. It won't hurt you to take her home, will it?"

I ain't no lady's man—me; but when a lady expresses a desire to converse with me I can't very well renege, can I? I walks right over where Miss Finney and Mrs. Smith are talking, and I says—

"Miss Finney, can I take you home?"

"Gracious!" says she. "Why, of course you may. Just a moment."

She walked back to the stage to get something, and Mrs. Smith says to me:

"That's lovely of you. I asked Magpie to take her home, but I'm glad you forestalled him."

I looked back at the door, but Magpie was gone. Anyway I never shot any man in the back, but it's just as well that he wasn't passing out about that time.

We walks down the stairs and up the street.

"Lovely moon, isn't it?" says she, and I nodded.

It was a full moon.

"I love moons; don't you?" she asks.

"Never had enough to do with 'em to form an opinion," says I.

Pretty soon she says—

"Your friend Mr. Simpkins is a jolly sort of person, isn't he?"

"Yes'm. He thinks a lot of you, ma'am."

"Of me?"

"Yes'm. He said you was the best looking woman person that ever hit this range. He said it wasn't often that you finds brains and beauty together."

"Did he say that—honestly?"

"Ma'am, he'd feel bad if he thought you suspicioned him of lying."

We walks along for a while, and then she says sort of soft-like:

"Don't you get lonesome at times? I do. I often envy the married folks."

"Wick and his wife fight like — sometimes, ma'am."

"Discord is the spice of life. You men are so big and noble."

"And most of us are bow-legged, ma'am."

"Physical faults weigh nothing against a noble soul. There is little evil in this great land."

When a female starts swinging a rope thataway I ducks the loop.

"Paw was a horse-thief," says I. "Mean-son-of-a-gun."

"I do not believe in heredity."

"I've lifted a few cows."

"You have? My, you must be strong. You never killed a man, did you?"

"Ma'am," says I, "I'm glad you asked this tonight, 'cause I can say no. I'm going to kill one tonight."

"Tonight?" she gasps. "Oh, no! Please —for my sake!"

"Partly," says I. "Mostly for mine, though."

"Oh-h-h-h-h!" she gasps. "How are you gug-going to kill him?"

"Spit in his eye and drown him."

"You are joking me."

"I always kill liars thataway, ma'am. If you'll get those pictures I'll take 'em to Magpie."

Honest to grandma, I reckon she thought I was going to kiss her when I said good-night, but I didn't.

I took her home and carried them pictures back to Magpie, and I figure I'd done enough for her.

She says to me—

"I had lots of chances to get married back East, but I came out here single."

I figures there must be an epidemic of astigmatism in her home town, but I congratulates her, and leaves.

Dirty Shirt is with Magpie when I arrives. Magpie sets there with one hand on his gun, but when I don't act hostile he rests easy.

"You ain't sore, are you, Ike?" he asks.

"Me? Sore? Say, cowboy, I sure ain't. Miss Finney is one nice female. She ain't no howling beauty, but money covers a lot of wrinkles."

"Money?" asks Magpie. "She got money?"

"It won't never do you any good. She's sore at you, old-timer. Said somebody told her you said she was the awfulest looking female that ever hit this range. She spoke well of Dirty Shirt."

"Of me?" asks Dirty. "The — she did!"

Magpie picks up his hat and tightens his belt.

"I've got to see Judge Steele about them costumes," he observes, and goes out of the door.

"Females with money are plumb scarce," observes Dirty Shirt. "Fact is, I ain't never seen one, Ike."

"Ordinarily I ain't the marryin' kind, but when you comes right down to it a feller don't never amount to much alone. The Lord intended us to take a mate; don't you know it?"

"Uh-huh; I reckon you're right, Dirty. I ain't found mine yet."

"Well," observes Dirty at last, "I reckon I'll be going. Must be about nine o'clock."



I RECKON I've been in bed a hour or so when somebody pokes into our door. Then steps inside. I can't figure out who it is so I slips my gun out from under the blanket and waits for 'em to move.

Pretty soon I hears somebody else coming. They walks into the door, and cometh a crash. I sets there on the bunk and listens to sounds of mortal combat.

I hears the stove turn a hand-spring and our cupboard cuts loose and falls off the wall. No voices—just grunts.

"Well," says I, "I reckon I'd better make a light."

I scratched a match and held it to one side of me, and then I saw enough to cause me to light the lamp on the chair beside the bed. Setting on the floor with a bucket on his head and the bale under his chin is Magpie.

Over by the stove with his feet in the oven and a saddle-blanket tied around his neck is Dirty Shirt. Them two *hombres* sure show signs of wear and tear.

"I—I got you—good!" gasps Dirty Shirt. "You—you—you——"

"Uh-huh," grunts Magpie foolish-like. "You danged bushwhacker, you!"

"Wait a minute," says I. "Let me in on this disorderly conduct. What is the matter?"

"L-I-look at my fuf-face!" pants Dirty.

I held the lamp closer and beholds Dirty's purple visage. He's got a cut over one eye, but I never seen purple blood before.

"Yes," says I, "you sure need a blood tonic, Dirty; but that ain't no reason to try and assassinate poor Magpie."

"He hit me—dang him!" yelps Dirty. "I walks in and he threw——"

"Ho-hold on!" explodes Magpie. "Shut up, Dirty! I never hit you."

"Oh, no! Suppose I never got hit a-tall, eh?"

"Magpie," says I, "you might tell us about it."

"She must 'a' got peeved," admits Magpie. "I-I reckon she did."

"Who?"

"Miss Finney. Ike, you know I don't allow nobody to think ill of me, so I goes down there to explain things. *Sabe?* She was writing a letter. I says to her—

"Somebody has told you things that I'm supposed to have said, ain't they?"

"She said yes. Well, I says to her:

"Don't you believe a danged word of it, ma'am. What I said was exactly the reverse."

"I didn't know you was there," states Dirty. "I asks Mrs. Gonyer if Miss Finney was engaged, and she said—

"Lordy, not that I know anything about!"

"And I says—

"I'll go in and set with her a while."

"I just opened the door—it was half-open—and I got hit in the face with this purple stuff."

"Uh-huh," says Magpie. "Ink. I ducked just in time."

We sets there and looks at each other for a while, and then Magpie says—

"Ike, just what did that female hear I said about her?"

"Just the opposite of what I told you, Magpie."

"You lied to me, Ike?"

"Did she tell you to tell me she wanted me to take her home?"

"Nope."

"Well we're even, ain't we?"

"Did she tell you she had money, Ike?"

"Nope—but she must have. She said she had lots of chances to get married back East, and it ain't reasonable to suppose that anybody would want to marry her for her looks."

Magpie sets there and stares at me while I dresses, hauling on my pants with one hand while I grips my six-gun with the other.

"I'll go home with you, Dirty, if you don't mind," says I.

"I don't mind," says Dirty, rubbing some of the purple ink into his ears. "My——! I feel like a printin'-press."

Me and Dirty left Magpie setting there with the bucket still on his head. We rides about half-way to Dirty's place when he stops his bronc, and says—

"Ike, if a feller marries a woman with money—does he get any of it?"

"After she dies, I reckon, Dirty."

"Oh, ——! Get up, bronc. A twenty-year endowment has got that kind of a marriage beat four ways from the jack."



IT'S the middle of the next afternoon when me and Dirty rides into Piperock. We finds Mighty Jones and Wick Smith setting tipped back in a pair of chairs in front of Buck's place. They sure look sad and dreary.

"How's every little thing, Mighty?" I asked, and Mighty spits very expressive-like.

"Small items ain't in my line, Ike, but the larger things of life is giving me a itch in my trigger-finger. Judge Steele and that danged schoolma'am has combined in restraint of my trade, seems like.

"That homely female mul'plication table has figured that I'm due to make about fifty per each on my turkeys, the same of which they considers a e-normous profit. The judge has adjudicated that I ain't to sell chances on my birds unless I agrees to let 'em have the use of 'em in what he calls a tableau.

"Pears to me that I've for to honkatonk my turkeys or lose what I paid for 'em."

"You feelin' sorry for Mighty?" asks Dirty, peering into Wick's sad features.

"Mighty ——!" snaps Wick. "I ain't sorry for nobody but me. I'm a Injun, I am! I'm a blood-hungry savage of 1620. I eat 'em alive and hide behind stumps on Sunday. Yah! My wife says to me—

"Wicksie, it's educational, and I'll be sore at you if you don't do it."

"What's a feller going to do, I asks you? Am I to have a grouchy wife in my wickiup or will I shave off my whiskers, drape my form in a gee-string and hide behind an alleged stump while the Pilgrims walk home from worship?"

"Does you mean that we appears naked, Wick?" I asks.

"Accordin' to the pre-vailing fashions of such a period. Magpie has got a picture of us savages doing a war-dance in the Wintertime, and all we've got is a gee-string, a roached foretop and a tommy hatchet. I reckon that me and you and Dirty has to bow to the fashions, Ike."

"Some day," observes Dirty, "I'm going to kill Magpie."

"Common sense teaches us such thoughts, nods Wick. Let's all go up and surround him, gents. There is a chance that we can make him change his mind."

Magpie must 'a' figured on such a thing 'cause he's setting on the front steps, and when he sees us he reaches inside and hauls out a Winchester.

"We comes more in sorrow than in anger," states Dirty.

"Be sorry about fifty feet away," says Magpie. "What do you want?"

"This is the Injun delegation," says I.

"We bows to superior intelligence to a certain degree, but beyond that we howls at the top of our voices. We'll show ourselves without a shirt, and maybe we'll agree to abolish boots for the time being, but we'll be gosh-hanged if the public of Piperock will get a chance to gaze upon our legs divine. Sabe? Now you speak, Wick."

"Magpie heard you, Ike."

"Three is a crowd," admits Dirty. "The crowd is against you, Magpie."

Magpie caresses that Winchester and we hears the hammer click.

"Regarding same," says Magpie soft-like, getting to his feet, "turn around! March! We'll stop at Ricky's shop and get you *hombres* trimmed. Sabe?"

"My ——!" grunts Dirty. "Got to be nude in the face too, eh?"

Ricky uncoils himself from his chair and grins like a fool.

Magpie hands him the leaf out of a book, and they examines same.

"Sabe that kind of a haircut?" asks Magpie, and Ricky nods.

"Uh-huh. Just leave a top-knot about two inches wide and four inches long on top. Scalp-lock, eh? Shall I remove the hair from the face?"

"Clean as a hound's tooth, Ricky."

"Not me!" yells Wick. "You ain't got no right——"

"Unhook their guns, Ricky," says Magpie weary-like. "Can't trust a Injun. Now shut up—all of you. Maybe I ain't got no right to make you do this, but you're going to have it done just the same."

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roars Mighty. "Some haircut! Haw! Haw! Haw!"

"Like it, Mighty?" grins Magpie.

"Great stuff!" explodes Mighty.

"Glad you like it," says Magpie. "You're next, Mighty."

Mighty bucked against it but got trimmed just the same. Magpie ducked out with our guns about the time Ricky got through, and then Ricky asks us for four bits per each.

"Charge it to Uncle Sam," says I. "We're wards of the Government."

Ricky howled like a wolf, so we tied him to his chair and left him. We meets Miss Finney at the corner, and we all takes off our hats to her. Dirty looked back at her and gasps:

"My ——! We must look awful, gents. She walked into the pump and fell down!"

We finds Judge Steele over in Buck's place, and he's orating loud and free.

"I hereby adjudicates that Mighty Jones be outlawed on the grounds of humanity and good cheer. He refuses us the usage of his acquired property to be used as part and parcel of our glorious entertainment; so I asks you to refrain from purchasing chances on his raffle."

"I has suffered a change of heart, judge," says Mighty. "My conscience hurts me, and I repents in gunny-sacks and ashes.

"How many chances does you folks desire on my exclusive birds? This deck is for Hiawather and the other is on Evangeline.

"Step up, gents, and take a chance. You can't get stung for more than one dollar per chance."

Piperock folks are the kind that take chances. All that Mighty had to do was to spread his tickets and take the money. Even Old Testament spent about a dollar. Hassayampa Harris grabbed a handful of Hiawather, and then him and Tombstone Todd almost got to the shooting stage over who owned a Evangeline chance that fell on the floor. "Jay Bird" Whittaker and his Cross J bunch got there in time to get the leavings.

Several more punchers drifted in and howls loud because they're late. Whereupon Buck suggests that we start a poker game, a ticket to be worth its face value in the pot.

Me and Dirty Shirt loses ours in the first jack-pot and then Wick Smith's three treys bumped in "Big Foot" Forrest's seven-full, which eliminates Wick from the festivities. Then the three of us gathers in a corner and talks over the wrongs of the redskins.

Wick is a strong prohibitionist. In fact he's so strong that he didn't stock his root-house with anything but raw alchol. He gets a quantity of it and we goes up to my shack, where we proceeds to get ready for the war-path.

We've fought over the battle of the Big Horn, and are just about to reject any peace offer that might come our way when Magpie comes home. He grins at our top-knots, but we sets stoical—like Indians always do in stories.

"Pshaw!" says Magpie. "You fellers ain't got no kick coming. I gave your heads their first sanitary moment they've had since you was born."

"Don't laugh at him, Dirty," says I. "He'll get killed before morning—I hope."

"Not this holiday, Ike," grins Magpie. "This is a real one. Got a lot of new and novel features. Feller by the name of "Cut-Bank" Campbell, who lives up by Bill Thatcher's place, has joined Bill's orchestra, and he's got the dangedest musical utensil you ever seen. I thought I'd heard mostly everything in the music line, but right now I feels that I ain't begun to hear things.

"Say, Miss Finney wanted to know if you fellers couldn't do a little war-dance. Know what I mean? Kinda open the show thataway."

"I won't danch!" says Dirty. "Shing a shong, but no danch."

"I'll do th' shootin' if shomebody wants to dance," says Wick.

"You won't have no guns on you," reminds Magpie. "All you'll have will be hatchets."

"Tha's all right," says Wick. "Messy but satisfying."

"I'm goin' home," says Dirty. "Goin' home t' eat."

"I'll go with you," says I.

"You fellows be here in time to dress for that tableau," says Magpie. "Tomorrow you can have Ricky clip off them top-knots. Clipping is good for the hair."

"Yash," says Dirty. "Sheep-dip is good for sheep—try it on yourself."

We rides out of town, and then Dirty gets a brilliant idea. Dirty does get the brightest thoughts when he's inoculated with delirium tremens.

"We've been imposh't upon, Ike," says he. "We been maltreated. Let's go past Mighty's shack and steal his turkeys. Goo' joke, eh?"

"No," says I. "We're honest men, Dirty. Let us not sully our alabaster pasts. None of the Harper tribe has ever been beheaded for stealing, and I won't break the set. Nossir!"



WE HAD a — of a time getting that crate out of Mighty's window.

It's about three-by-three-by-four, but it was danged lucky for us that the window was big enough. Dirty crawled out and took the crate off my neck, and then we prepared to carry it away.

Any old time you starts to carry a crate like that on a half-broke bronc—don't. I

had to help Dirty on his bronc, and then I can't get on mine, so he gets off and helps me on.

"Now," says I, "we're back where we started from, Dirty."

"Tha's good," applauds Dirty. "We're holding our own. I'll hand the crate up to you, and then you can—well, let's get the crate up to you firsh't."

Dirty's intentions were good. In fact he surprized me by showing such good sense. All would have been well, but when he got about three feet from me he stumbled. The crate hit my bronc in the knees and Dirty butted into its flank, and when I shook the stars out of my eyes I'm half in and half out of that window.

"Your horshes," says Dirty wondering-like. "Your horshes went away without you, Ike; all three of 'em."

I crawls out and adjusts my ribs. It is some time before speech cometh to me, and then I says:

"Well, we'll have to ride double, I reckon."

"Tha's good idea, Ike. Bes' idea you ever had. My, my! That is wonderful. But what will we ride upon?"

"Where's your bronc?" I asks.

"Oh, he's gone. I still got the bridle."

We sets down and considers things.

"I reckon we've got to be pall-bearers for two turkeys," says I.

"Shall we each take one?" asks Dirty. "What shay?"

"I don't know nothing about 'em," says I. "Do you?"

"Nawsir. I know there is turkeys, Ike, but that's all."

"Tell you what we'll do," says I, taking a two-bit piece out of my pocket. "I'll flip this two-bits. Heads we carry crate and all; tails we separate 'em."

Heads came up. We each took one end of the box, and started for— Come to think of it, we didn't have any place in mind. We came to the foot-log across Medicine Creek and sat down to think it over.

"I won't pack one end of that box across that log," says I, but Dirty didn't care.

"Pack it alone," says he. "I'm balancher, you know it? Demonstrate to you, Ike. Go alone firsh't. Jones's has all been tight-rope walkers ever since the— Who-o-o-o-up!"

Sure he fell in. I saved his life—I think.

Anyway we both washed out on a sand-bar and crawled through the brush back to our crate.

Then we took the crate on our shoulders and waded the danged creek. Then we sat down to talk it over and pour the water out of our boots, when a voice says—

"Well, well!"

Here is Magpie and Scenery Sims, our useless sheriff.

"Turkeys, eh?" squeaks Scenery. "Bringing 'em in for us, eh?"

"Mighty must 'a' found a prohibition cache 'cause he ain't in no shape to come after 'em," explains Magpie. "Might as well pick up that crate and come on, boys."

"Me?" asks Dirty. "Nawsir. I've been packing two-thirds of it and hauling Ike, too. I'm all through. Sabe?"

"You're a liar, Dirty," says I. "I've been packing all of it and yelling at the top of my voice to keep you from falling asleep."

"Just pick up the crate and come along," says Magpie sweet-like.

"You're crazy if you think so!" says I. "No danged squeaky imitation of an officer, and a long lean muzzler like——"

I looks up at Magpie. I want to see if I can think of something new to call him—but I just picks up my side of the crate, and away we went.

Them two snake-hunters are uncoiling ropes, and I'd rather walk and pack a box than I would to be dragged—and pack a box.

They made us carry that box into the Mint Hall and place it on the stage. It's pretty dark by this time, and I reckon nobody seen us come into town.

Me and Dirty hadn't got our guns back yet, so we didn't yowl at Magpie, but we waited for a chance at Scenery and kicked his feet out from under him when Magpie went outside. We took his gun and threw it into the back yard, and then went over to Buck's place, where we find Mighty setting on the steps. He sure is alcoholic.

"Welcome, li'l strangers," says he. "Set down and cogitate on the sins of iniquity. Wonderful world—know it?"

"Low me to ask question? Will, eh? Know what a me-nag-i-ree is?"

"What in —— is a me-nag-i-ree?" asks Dirty.

"There y'are. Animules, Dirty. Peculiar and rare animules. I'm goin' to start one."

"Good!" says Dirty. "Show me and Ike where your stuff is planted and we'll donate every freak animal we discover. Las' time I sheen a pink collywampus. You got any of them, Mighty?"

"Naw!" says Mighty disgusted-like. "You shpeak of seein' things. I'm nacheral hishtorian. *Sabe?* You unnerstand wil'-cats?"

"Oh, them patient little darlings," says Dirty; but just then cometh Magpie and the judge.

"Come on, fellers," says Magpie. "It's time to get ready for the show."

We left Mighty cogitating on the sins of iniquity—whatever that is—and went behind the scenes. The floor of the stage is covered with cotton, and they've anchored a small pine-tree in the middle of the stage. They nailed bark on three beer-kegs to make 'em look like stumps, and Pete Gonyer is fussing with a bed-tick full of chopped-up paper.

"Snow," grins Pete. "I get up above the curtain and sift it down. *Sabe* the idea? Looks more like snow than the real stuff."

They've got a place for us Injuns to dress. Mrs. Smith looks like something that just came over and can't find her way back. Wick has been into his root-house again and don't care what happens.

We didn't have to wear them gee-strings. The committee gets together and decides that being as this is supposed to be cold weather they'd better let us Injuns dress warmer; so they gives us breech-clouts instead.

Them Pilgrims sure look the part. They've got tall tops built on their som-breros, and Miss Finney made 'em paper collars that stick out like they had their head through a dish-pan. Their pants are cut off at the knees, and they've cut off their boots at the ankle and sewed some big harness buckles on 'em.

Magpie is packing a sawed-off shot-gun, while Testament and the judge are armed with Sharps rifles. Old Testament is packing a Bible, Magpie has a mail-order catalog, and the judge has the State registry of brands. They sure look pious.

"Ike, do you know why the Pilgrims came from England?" asks the judge.

"After looking at you three, judge, I'd opine they got chased out."

"No, Ike; there was too many kings," says Testament wise-like.

"Defective deck," says Dirty, fussing with a safety-pin. "Once over in Mesquite I held five kings. Two kings of hearts. New deck, too."

"Did you win?" asks the judge.

"Nope; I ate 'em. Think I'm a fool?"



JUST then somebody announces that the raffle is about to start, so we all crowds at the end of the curtain to watch it. Buck Masterson has been appointed to conduct the drawing, and Scenery Sims is going to draw the numbers from the hats.

"Ladies and gents," announces Buck, "in these two hats reposes the mates to the tickets you holds on Hiawather and E-vangeline, two noble turkey-birds. If anybody knows of any reason why we can't start this raffle let 'em speak now or forever hold their yap."

"Nobody got any kick? All right. Mister Sims will now settle the ownership of E-vangeline."

Scenery grabs a ticket out of the hat and hands it to Buck.

"Number—uh—sixteen wins E-vangeline. Number sixteen! Now for Hiawather. Number eighty-one wins Hiawather."

"I wins the female fowl!" yelps Tombstone Todd, standing up and waving his arms. "I wins the female fowl!"

"I got eighty-one!" whoops Hassayampa Harris. "Hurrah for Curlew!"

"Now," says Buck, "we will proceed with the program-me."

Buck squints at a sheet of paper and clears his throat.

"Ahem-m-m-m— Mrs. Wick Smith will recite 'Tear-Drops.' This poem was wrote by Muley Bowles. I heard it once; so she don't interest me none."

Mrs. Smith waddles up to the platform. She's got sort of a Mother Hubbard on over her Pilgrim clothes. Buck helps her get up, and then she faces the audience.

I don't reckon she ever recited much, 'cause she sure is nervous. She licks her lips and whispers like she was letting 'em in on a secret—

"It was a dewy—dewy—dewy——"

"Sh-h-h-h-h!" hisses "Half-Mile" Smith. "It's the battle of Maniller!"

"The birds was flying high," says Mrs. Smith like she was afraid she'd scare the birds. "I—I—I——"

And there she stuck. She looks around

sort of wild-like, and then she croaks:
 "Wicksie! Oh, Wicksie! Darn it, have you got that paper?"

"Maw, I ain't got it," chokes Wick.
 "Never mind it! Bow and back up, can't you?"

She could. She backed into our curtain and almost ruined it, but we managed to skid her to one side. The crowd sure applauded that poem.

"I'm through!" she wails. "I'll never recite again."

"Maw," asks Wick, "is that a threat or a promise?"

I hears Buck talking again, so I peers out. Down in front with Half-Mile is "Pinky" Parsons and "Speedy" Wheeler. Them two last-named *hombres* are always just one jump ahead of a sheriff. Buck is making another introduction.

"Ladies and gents, I hereby introduces to you Mr. Campbell. He will solo for your edification. He is willing to take a chance, such as they are, and I asks you all to remember this. You didn't pay a danged cent to get in—and the door is open. Amen."

This bow-legged red-headed *hombre* climbs up on the stage. He's got his arms full of what looks like a lot of hoochie-koochie horns stuck into a balloon. He begins to blow, the balloon begins to swell, and our ears gets handed a mulligan of music, the like of which never was heard on this range before.

Zaw-a-a-a-a—er-r-r-r-r—toot-toot—
 ver-r-r-r-r—aw-w-w-w-w—toot—
Bang! Boof!

I sees Cut-Bank fall flat on the stage, where he sets and looks at his punctured balloon. Pinky Parsons is standing up in his chair with a gun in his hand and a pained expression on his homely face.

"My ——!" he gasps. "I ain't no humane society, but I got too big a heart to see anything suffer like that."

"That was music, you hair-triggered snake-hunter!" squeaks Scenery.

Speedy and Pinky looks at each other and shakes their heads.

"Pinky," says Speedy, "I done told you that things were changing. This here country ain't no ways what she used to be."

Buck gets up on the platform and makes the peace sign.

"Folks, you will have to ex-cuse these two ignorant cow-trailers. Their ears ain't no ways trained to harmonious sounds."

"I gives 'em my forgiveness," says Half-Mile. "I sure does."

"Ladies and gents, is there anybody in the hall what ain't never heard the Cross J quartet sing a song?"

Pinky and Speedy holds up their hands, and Buck covers 'em with a gun while Scenery trots down and takes their guns away from 'em. Then Muley Bowles, Chuck Warner, "Telescope" Tolliver and Henry Peck files up on the stage.

"Just one minute," pleads Pinky. "Are them four going to sing together?"

"All to once," nods Buck.

"Then wait until me and Speedy get out. I never came here to have my ears insulted. Give us our guns and let us depart in peace."

"Set down!" yelps Buck. "It's bad but it don't last long. Maybe they'll just sing a chorus."

"You can all go to——!" states Chuck Warner. "I won't sing a particle. We didn't come here to be insulted and abused."

"Fifty-fifty," hisses Half-Mile.

"You shut up!" yells Telescope. "Singing to you would be like casting pearls before swine."

"When it comes to your kind of singing, Telescope, I'm no hawg."

"All set for the tableau!" warns Miss Finney, and everybody except us four aborigines gets off the stage. We're standing there looking at each other as the curtain pulls back, and I happens to think of something.

"Ain't we going to use them turkeys?" I whispers, but Magpie shakes his head.

"Everybody forgot 'em. Talk in gutturals!"

"Gug-gug-glap?" says Wick.

"Flug woop moof," says I.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" roars Half-Mile. "Look at Ike Harper's legs! Mamma mine!"

"Look at Dirty Shirt's!" whoops Abe Mudgett. "He needs pacing-hopples to keep him from interfering!"

The audience is getting delirious, and I hears Magpie hissing.

"Tke! Look this way and get astonished! Can't you hear the bell?"

One little bell don't sound like much in that hall, but I shades my eyes like I seen an Injun doing in a picture, and then I says:

"Grab a stump! Church is out!"

Then here comes the Pilgrims.

"Hey, Wick!" yells somebody in the audience. "Get around the other side! You ain't hid."

Wick is bumped over behind his stump, but he's on the wrong side. Of course he has to slip getting around on the other side, the bark falls off his beer-keg and the darned thing rolls away, leaving poor Wick humped up like Pontiac with the pip.

The Pilgrims wander to the front of the stage, paying no attention to us Injuns, so we sets down on our stumps. It's hard work humping over thataway. Old Testament shoves his hand inside his coat and glares at the audience.



"IN THE year of our Lord 1620," says he in a graveyard voice, "a little band of Pilgrims sailed for our shores. Braving—braving——"

He stops and begins to hunt through his pockets.

"The mud must be deep up there," observes Half-Mile. "That's the second rig to get stuck tonight."

"I had that speech in my pocket," says Testament. "I sure——"

Woosh! About ten pounds of cut paper lands right on top of his tall hat.

"Get out from under that tree!" yelps Abe Mudgett. "It's thawin'!"

"Hey, Pete!" croaks Magpie. "Scatter it a little, can't you? What do you think you are—an avalanche?"

"Who in —— is running this storm?" snaps Pete. "You *hombres* are so far back I can't snow on you. Maybe I can climb out a— Look out!"

The storm broke in all its fury. The bedtick landed on top of Wick Smith, and Pete landed all spraddled out on the judge.

"Snowing shepherds!" whoops Doughgod Smith. "Get off that stage, Clementine! Ain't you got sense enough to come out of the storm?"

Old Testament ain't moved. He's standing there peering at a piece of paper, and all to once he yelps—

"What number won Hiawatha, Buck?"

"Number eighty-one. Why?"

"Because I've got it!"

There is silence for a moment. The judge gets to his feet and tries to pump wind back into his lungs. Dirty picks up a piece of paper which fell out of the judge's pocket and looks at it.

"Buck," says Dirty, "what number won E-vangeline?"

"Sixteen."

"Congratulations, judge," says Dirty, handing him the card. "You won E-vangeline. Here's number sixteen."

"What you talking about?" howls Tombstone. "I won that bird! I'm the holder of number sixteen!"

"I've got eighty-one!" explodes Hassayampa. "That's my bird!"

"Oh-h-h-h-h!" wails Miss Finney, wringing her hands. "The tableau is ruined!"

Nobody seemed to care much.

"I thank you one and all," states the judge foolish-like. "I do thank you for the noble honors, and I accept the nomination."

"Honors!" howls Tombstone. "That's my bird, I tell you!"

"Peace, brothers," says Testament. "Peace be unto you. I hates to raise my voice in anger, but I feel that I own that certain bird."

"What's the matter with you folks?" demands Hassayampa. "I've got the winning number right here."

He tears his way out of the aisle and climbs up on the stage, and right behind him is Tombstone.

"Give me them tickets—all four of you!" snaps Buck.

Buck takes all four tickets and shuffles 'em up, and then holds them out in his hands.

"Tombstone, pick out your sixteen."

Tombstone takes two of the tickets and turns 'em around and around.

Hassayampa grabs the other two, and acts foolish.

"There ain't no question but what there's a sixteen and a ninety-one, and a eighteen and an eighty-one, but which is which?" asks Buck.

"Mine was sixteen as plain as the nose on your face!" yowls Tombstone. "Just that darned plain, I tell you."

"I'm going to have mine," says Hassayampa. "I win with eighty-one."

"One of them birds belongs to me," states Old Testament. "I take what's mine."

"Where is them disputed birds?" asks Buck.

"Back on the stage," says Magpie, "but nobody gets one until this tangle is straightened out."

"I won't relinquish," declares the judge. "I'll law over it first."

"Me too!" yelps Tombstone. "I'll go plumb to the Supreme Court."

"You shut up!" squeaks Scenery. "Everybody shut up!"

"This is a good show," declares Pinky. "Ain't she good, Speedy?"

"Shore is. Can't tell the hero from the villain."

"I've got a idea," states Telescope. "All this wrangling won't get us no place. Suppose we turns the birds loose up there and let them four belligerents settle ownership. The one what catches a bird owns it."

"It is below the dignity of the church to chase turkeys in public," declares Testament.

"Same with the court," nods the judge.

"Well, get off the stage then!" snaps Hassayampa. "Me and Tombstone ain't finicky; are we, Tombstone?"

"We just about ain't. I won that bird fair and square——"

"The church will fight for its rights," says Testament soft-like.

"Justice will prevail," says the judge, cinching up his belt.

Magpie and Buck hauls the crate to the center of the stage. The slats are nailed so close together that you can't see inside, but the ends of the slats extends beyond the sides of the box.

"Turn her upside down," advises Dirty Shirt. "Loosen the slats thataway, and when you're ready—turn her over and the birds are loose. That gives everybody a fair shake."

"Most everybody in the hall crowds up to the front. This is going to be a lot better entertainment than Piperock ever gave. Magpie pokes me in the ribs.

"Going without a hitch, Ike," he grins. "Ain't you sorry?"

"Six to one that Testament don't get a feather," yells somebody.

"Even money that the judge gets crippled! One to two that Hassayampa gets 'em both!"

"Wait, fellers!" yells Magpie. "Give them gamblers a chance."

They lays the crate on its top and loosens the slats all the way around. Then they makes them four ticket-holders line up on one side of the stage. Magpie stands at the far side with a gun in his hand.

"Now," says he, "when I shoot—get going. If a bird flies into the audience it must be brought back. Are you ready?"

"Let her go!" yelps Hassayampa.

Dirty Shirt yanks that crate back just as Magpie shoots. I seen them turkey-chasers dash forward—comes a yelp of agony, a long-drawn-out yowl, and then Ike Harper headed for that tree.

Man, I sure climbed. I went onward and upward until I runs out of tree, and it seems like everybody on that stage had the same idea.

I hears a snarl and a crash and part of Bill Thatcher's bull fiddle hit me in the face. Then comes a burst of pistol-shots, a louder burst of profanity, and then I tries to keep Dirty Shirt from climbing past me.

"Hold on!" I yelps. "I can't go no further, you fool! I'm at the top!"

"Oh, ——, give me room!" he roars. "The top don't mean nothing to me!"

"Timber-r-r-r-r!" yells somebody, and I has the feeling that our theatrical pine-tree has decided to lay down.

My face brushes the side of the curtain as we came down. I tried to get loose and jump, but Dirty has his arms locked around my legs; so I had to stay. I thought of lots of things as that tree goes horizontal, but I sure gets absent-minded when she goes perpendicular.

Maybe I didn't get knocked cold—I don't know. I know that when I came to I was under that tree, and Dirty still hung on to my legs.

I manages to yank loose and stagger out. Then I fell over something and hit my head on a chair.

I sets there and stares into Judge Steele's face. He's propped up against a seat, and around his neck is the earthly envelope of what had been a perfectly bad wildcat.

The judge smiles soft-like and nods his head. He's back in Missouri right now, where he came from. Likely he thinks he's a fishing for cat-fish. Man, he sure must a got shocked proper.



THAT hall looks just like I knowed she would. There ain't no use talking—Piperock can't entertain without a casualty list. Up on the stage is that turkey crate, and jack-knifed inside of it with the top of his head out one end and his feet out the other is Old Testament.

"You better go home, old-timer," says I. "There will be work for you to do as soon as they get the pieces picked up and matched together."

"I can't," says he in sort of a croak. "I can't do it, Ike."

"Are you hurt, Testament?" I asks.

"Yea, verily I am. I don't dare get up."

"'Fraid you're hurt bad?"

"No, you darn fool!" he wails. "I'm settin' on that other wildcat!"

"Ain't it dead?"

"I take no chances, brother."

"Wait," says I, poking around on the floor. "I'll get a gun and shoot through the crate under you, Testament."

"By the Bull of Bashan, you will not!" he gasps. "You don't know how deep I am in this accursed crate. Hold thy gun ready and I will jump."

I couldn't find any gun, but Testament didn't know that. He yanks himself loose and sprawls out on the stage.

"I—I guess it's dead," he whispers, and up from the inside of that crate comes the head of Scenery Sims.

He's been bent all out of shape, and his arms and legs act like they were asleep.

"Huh-huh-huh—" he gasps, shaking his head. "Huh-huh-huh—"

"Where is that wildcat?" asks Testament foolish-like.

"I—huh—huh—I ain't—huh—got it," gasps Scenery.

I picks up a pile of clothes and slides off the stage. Dirty Shirt is setting there counting his toes; so I yanks him to his feet and leads him outside, where I helps him put on some pants. He ain't quite got things figured out yet, 'cause he peers at me and says—

"Who won, Ike?"

"I don't know for sure, Dirty, but I think the Populists have a slight majority."

We finds Miss Finney setting on the stairs with her hat jammed down over her eyes, and still talking—

"... and then Dr. Tilton will tell them why we celebrate Thanksgiving."

"Yes'm," says I. "They'll want to know, I reckon."

There's a big crowd milling around in the street; so I yanks Dirty around the corner and we pilgrims off down the road on foot. We're about a mile from town when we hears somebody coming.

"Look!" grunts Dirty, peering ahead. "Did you ever see bigger sage-hens in your life, Ike?"

Then we hears Mighty's voice:

"Stay in the road, dag-gone you! Lasht time I'll ever punch turkeys. Whooee!"

Them two birds has been herded until they ain't got any ambition to go farther. Me and Dirty each picked one up and sets down behind a mesquite-bush. Here comes Mighty, weaving up the road in the dark, talking to himself.

"Goin' to be late. Yes shir. Man of my word. Wonder who shtole my bob-cats? Wonder who? Me-nag-i-ree all gone. Dag-gone th' luck!"

Mighty weaved on past us, and his voice faded out in the distance. We sets there for a while, and then I says:

"Our conscience is clear, Dirty, 'cause nobody seems to own these fowl. Who was the poet who wrote E-vangeline and Hia-wather?"

"Wrote 'em?" queries Dirty. "Huh! I don't know and I don't care who wrote 'em, Ike, but I do know who's going to eat 'em."

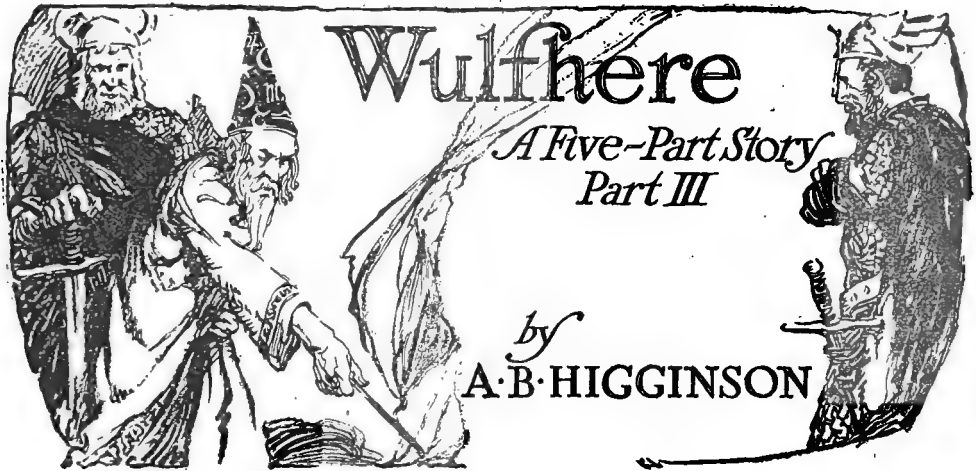
"Yes," says I. "We've got two things to be thankful for, Dirty."

"Three, Ike."

"What's the third reason, Dirty?"

"That two-bit piece might have come tails, Ike."





The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

IT WAS Winter in the year of our Lord 691. Within a hut in England sat an old hermit and two mighty men clad in armor and brown Saxon garb. The hermit told this tale:

My name is Edbert. I was born a member of the Northfolk, and of these people my father was king. But when I was a lad my stepbrother Tytla poisoned my father and plotted to poison me also, for he wanted to be king. So I fled, taking with me my sister Cyneswithe.

Hot on our track came Tytla's men, and they had almost overtaken us when we drew near the wall of another town. As we were about to be slain there came a clanging at the gate and out marched a company of soldiers. Behind them stalked the hugest, fiercest man ever I laid eyes on. It was Penda the Terrible. Then I knew that it was he who, an out-cast lad, had wandered by my father's house when I was a boy, and I had given him to eat and drink. Forthwith I called this to his mind, and remembering he saved me and my sister.

So came Cyneswithe and I to Penda's town.

Cyneswithe Penda took to wife, and I in time became his priest and counselor, for I was wiser than any man of his kingdom and I ministered to his ambition.

Would he go up against Cynegils of Wesssex?

"Go up, King, go up and prosper," said I. "For surely thou art champion of the holy gods, and they go with thee."

He went and prospered, and I became a prophet in his eyes.

Now Penda had two sons, and whenever another was born to one of his wives it was put to death.

"Many a king is slain by his false sons," he said. "What could I do against a score or more?"

But when Cyneswithe bore him a son, that son was not slain. For at the same time a son was born dead to me and I changed the one for the other, so that my child was buried as Penda's and Penda's grew up as mine. None knew this but Cyneswithe and Penda's mother and I.

The lad was named Wulfhære. He waxed strong. Now when Wulfhære was scarce grown a man the king called a tournament wherein all could show

their strength and skill, and at this tournament was a great man with a bearskin hanging over his shoulder. He it was who, when all others failed, pulled from the great oaken block the ax that Penda himself drave there. He had a bear, and this bear fought with three Dane dogs and killed them.

At this certain men grew wroth and plotted to waylay the stranger and kill him, for they were friends of Immin, who owned the dogs. But Wulfhære, in whom a great love for the valiant stranger had sprung up, heard them, and he was there when they fell upon the stranger by a lonely pass, and he and the stranger killed these men.

"Now come with me, lad, and be my brother," said the stranger. "I am king of a strange people in the land of Hwicce, but when the notion takes me I wander to distant lands, and I would like to have thee to be my comrade."

"Nay, Sir Bear, I can not," said Wulfhære, though he wished greatly to do so.

He could not bring himself to part from Elflaeda, my daughter, whom he loved. So he turned back home, little dreaming how soon he would become blood brother to the stranger and the fame of the Bear Brethren would be known over all England.

NOW King Penda wished to restore the ancient gods, and because of this wish his heathen priests held great favor in his sight. But they were false priests and lusted for power, and so brought it about that many thanes were sacrificed. Of this great slaughter Penda at last became mightily sick, for he saw that the thanes were being slain not because the gods desired sacrifice but because the priests wished to be rid of them. So by a trick he bared the treachery of the priests, and the thanes fell upon them and killed them all.

It was during this time that Aidan the Saint first came among us and preached to us of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Shortly after this Penda sent me on a mission to a far part of the country, and I took with me Ostryth my wife, Elflaeda my daughter, and Wulfhære. On the journey Wulfhære tried to capture two bear cubs, but a great brown and white bear attacked him and

bore him away into the mountains. I left Ostryth and Elfaeda in the far country and returned home alone, and there I found my house in ashes and naught left of my other fair wife but a few charred bones. Penda had done this, for he suspected the deceit I had practised on him about the parentage of Wulfhere. Me he summoned to his presence and tried with the ordeal of boiling water, wherefrom is my arm withered to this very day. In his fury even he slew his own mother with a spear. But I did not confess, and at last he believed me. After that I lived only to revenge myself upon him.

NOW let me tell you of Wulfhere. Stunned by a blow from the animal's great paw, he was carried by the bear far into the mountains. He awoke to see a strange sight. The bear had dropped him. Rushing upon them was a man clad in an immense bearskin, brown and white. The skin was hooked about his body and the head with the upper jaw and teeth rested like a helm upon his head. Only his face and hands and feet were visible. Straight at the bear he rushed and thrust a long-pointed dagger in the great brute's throat. Down they went to the ground in a wrestle of death, and as they fell a strange thing happened. Out from the woods on every side rushed huge bears, brown and white. Wulfhere saw them hurl themselves on the fighters and then his senses left him and he knew no more.

When Wulfhere again awoke he was in a hut whose walls were hung with weapons and the skins of bears. Bending over him was the man clad strangely in skins, and he saw now that it was the same man who two Summers ago had brought the bear to Penda's tournament, and for whom he had fought.

CHAPTER XVII

HOW THE BEAR-PEOPLE FEAST ON HUMAN FLESH FOR THE FIRST TIME, AND LIKE IT

MANY months passed and still Wulfhere abode among the bears, and though he found great comfort in their company and in the company of his blood-brother, yet his heart longed for Elfaeda his sister and for me, Edbert, his foster-father. He told his longings to Eanhere.

"Go down to the village, brother; perchance thou mayest learn something there," Eanhere said.

Accordingly he clad himself in clothes that Eanhere gave him and went to the village. He left his red ax behind that none might guess who he was, and took with him a sword. The villagers saw him stalk through the street and drew back from him.

"See, his look is fierce like the look of a

The stranger told this tale:

"My name is Eanhere. My tribe was the tribe of Hwicce, and my father was ruler over that people. But his enemies conspired against him and killed him, and I fled. On the fourth day I came to a hut far back in the hills, and in this hut a hermit gave me shelter.

"This old hermit told me of how one named Thorkell came out of the north with a great white bear which he mated with a brown bear in these mountains. From these sprang many bears, brown and white, and as the years went by they multiplied into a great herd over which Thorkell ruled, for he could speak the bear tongue. But when Thorkell became old he gave over the rule of the bear people to a young man who had wandered into the mountains and himself came away to die.

"The old hermit, as he went about the land, found Thorkell in that very hut to which I had wandered, and there he stayed when Thorkell died, for he thought the young man who now hunted with the bears was a lost son for whom he was seeking. He could see them go pounding by at night, hot on the chase, and tried to cry out to the man who led them, but could not for fear and trembling.

"So I, Eanhere, sought out the place where the young man lived with the bears. He taught me how to rule the brutes and speak their tongue, and then he went back to his father. Here I have stayed ever since. The bear that carried you off was not one of mine. No doubt he would have devoured you had not my bears slain him."

So it came to pass that Wulfhere came to live with Eanhere in the mountains. Together they ruled the brown and white bears and led them in the chase. In all Hwicce they became known as the Bear Brethren, and their fame spread through the land.

wild beast," they whispered to each other; "maybe he is one of the Bear Brethren."

But others said—

"Nay, for the brethren carry red axes and this man has but a sword."

He asked them to lead him to the head man of the village that he might speak with him, and this they did. The head man welcomed him and bade him sit with him in his house. Wulfhere told him he was athane of Wessex and that he had journeyed hither to see how things stood in this land, and what was its people's attitude toward Penda the King of Mercia.

"Alas, lord," the head man answered, "we stand in daily dread of that fierce man. He goeth about like a devouring flame, and presently he will lick up this village and all this land."

"So it is with us in Wessex," answered Wulfhere. "We are making ready there to resist him if he comes, as come he will, for he has sworn to take all England. Hast ever seen here any of his host?"

"Aye, two Summers gone there came into

the village one of Penda's thanes with ten soldiers and two women. They asked for food and shelter for the night and wished to know the way to the Magesetås; then in the morning they passed on."

"What like was this thane, and what was his name?" Wulfhære asked.

"Edbert, the soldiers called him, and one told me he had put away his wife and was taking her and her daughter back to Deira."

"Didst see them again?"

"Yea, lord, a few weeks later they came this way again, but now there were three-score men of Penda's led by another thane, and Edbert seemed to be a prisoner, albeit he was not fettered. He acted very strangely. The women were not with them."

"He acted very strangely?"

"Aye, the soldiers told me he had lost his wits, and had gone mad because of his many troubles."

"And did they say what troubles?"

"Penda, they said, had burned up all his house, slaughtered his wives and children and serfs, and left him nothing."

Now Wulfhære's heart turned sick when he heard this, and he tried to talk of other things. At last he rose to go, when the doorway was darkened and in rushed a serf.

"A company of soldiers sixty strong march through the village," he cried.

The head man sprang to the door and with him Wulfhære. Coming down the street with long strides, their javelins flashing in the sun, their swords and armor clanking, was a company of Penda's warriors. Wulfhære knew them as soon as he had set eyes on them. Guided by a churl of the village they came straight to the head man's door. The leader bade his men stand in the street, and himself strode forward. He was a new man and a young, and Wulfhære did not recognize him.

"The better for me," he said to himself, "for neither will he know me."

"I am Coelred, thane to Penda, King of Mercia," he announced. "Art thou the head man of this village?"

"I am," the head man answered, "and Bassa is my name. What is thy errand?"

"We are sent to search for one Wulfhære, the son of Edbert, said to have been slain near here."

"Come in, noble thane, and we will talk over this matter," said Bassa.

The head man led Coelred into the house, and together they sat down by the fire, Wulfhære sitting a little way apart.

"Now tell me, Bassa, what knowest thou of Wulfhære," the thane inquired.

"I know nothing—nothing at all."

"Be careful how thou answerest, for Penda is not one to fool with. Think again, my friend."

"Thou sayest he was the son of Edbert. I am minded that two Summers gone one by that name came to this village. He returned hither held captive by Penda's men. Mad, they said he was, for Penda had slain all his house."

"*Sh*—say not Penda did it, but the gods. But Wulfhære—Wulfhære—what of him?"

"I never heard the name, Thane."

"He was slain by a bear near here, they said, a great bear brown and white. It dragged him off—whether alive or dead I know not."

"If he still lives then he is up in yonder mountains. Thou canst not get him there for the place is haunted. No man goes there for the ghosts of a nation dwell in those hills in the form of bears stark and grim, all colored alike, brown and white."

"Once only saw I a bear of those colors," said the thane. "Haunted or no we must climb yon mountain."

Wulfhære here spoke, for a plan came suddenly into his head—to get these men up in the hills and then fall upon them with his bears. His heart was sore against Penda for the great wrong he had done Edbert, and he, Wulfhære, would be avenged upon him.

"Thane, let me say a word," he said. "Yesterday I passed through a village five leagues from here, and there I heard strange tales of yonder mountains. Fierce bears live there, they said, albeit they are not many." This he said because he would not have Penda's thane fear the place. "One, Blood Ax, a man clad in a bearskin, leads them, and he has been long with them, but another, a young man who well may be Wulfhære is also with them. He is a man tall and slim they say, and fair, and he is very strong and swift."

"Mayhap it is the very man," said Coelred. "We will go and see on the morrow. But who art thou, friend?"

"My name is Eadwig," said Wulfhære. "I am a thane of Wessex and I journey to Northumbria."

"Very well, Eadwig, now show me the road that leads to this village that I may inquire further there."

Wulfhere took him to the door and pointed out the path.

"Good!" said the thane. "I will go that way tomorrow and will hunt out this bear among the mountains, and bring his carcass to the king."

He then disposed his men in an open space before the head man's door; then lying down on the bed Bassa had shown him he slept. Wulfhere and Bassa also laid them down, for by this the evening was well advanced.

Now when all were asleep Wulfhere rose up. Quietly he slipped from the house and away on swift feet to Eanhere in the hills, and told him all the tale.

"Good, my brother!" said Eanhere. "I and my people weary of slaying beasts that always fly from us. Now we will slay men." And he fairly danced with joy at the prospect.

That night the bears had no deer-hunt.

"They must rest," Eanhere said, "and sleep, for tomorrow they hunt men."

 WHEN Coelred of Mercia and his men rose in the morning they made preparations for their journey.

"Where is this Wessex man?" the thane asked.

They looked about everywhere but could not find him. He had fled in the night. Closely the thane questioned Bassa, threatening him with death if he did not answer truly, but all Bassa could say was, he did not know the man. It came to Coelred's mind that this man from Wessex might be Wulfhere himself, so he made haste and soon they were on the road to the next village.

When they reached there they inquired about the Wessex man, but no such person, the head man said, had passed that way. Now more and more the captain believed it must be Wulfhere who had deceived him, so making some more inquiries concerning the Bear Mountain he set out with his men toward it.

Meanwhile Wulfhere and Eanhere and their army of bears crept down the valley silently. From a cliff they could see Penda's men as they sat in a little grove eating their midday meal. Eanhere took half the bears and crept round to the

other side of the grove while Wulfhere waited on this side with the rest. Wulfhere crept quietly closer till only a small knoll stood between the Mercians and himself, and he could hear their loud talk and laughter.

"Ha, we will root this bear out of his den, and he will go the way of his people!" one said as he emptied his horn of mead.

"What care I for the ghosts?" cried another. "If he, a mortal, can go there among them, then so can I."

"Penda will give us good fat cattle for this," said a third.

"Who is afraid of bears?" bawled a great fellow with an ax the size of two on his shoulder. "Let all the bears in England come along; I'll make short work of them, I warrant!"

"I would I had this Wulfhere here before me," said the captain. "I'd wring his neck as a butcher wrings a chicken's!"

"Wulfhere is here; come now and wring his neck!"

Every man of them leaped to his feet, and looking up saw Wulfhere standing on the knoll but twenty paces off. They made as if to rush upon him, but Coelred waved them back.

"Stand still!" he cried. "He is for me!"

He drew his sword and strode to meet Wulfhere. It was a battle between ax and sword, and terrible were the blows that fell, for Coelred was a mighty man and a skilful swordsman.

"Stick him i' the belly, Coelred!" shouted a soldier.

"Carve me a bearsteak from his hams!" another cried.

"His claws for me to make a necklace for my lady!" said another.

"His tail for me!" one bellowed amid laughter.

"Now, Bear, I have thee!" cried Coelred as his sword shore through the handle of Wulfhere's ax.

"Not yet!" shouted Wulfhere, and he threw the piece of handle left in his hands into the Mercian's face, then leaped in at him and drove his dagger through his throat.

The Mercians made a rush upon him, but in a flash he had seized Coelred's sword, and calling his bears he shouted their battle-cry and fell upon his assailants. The bears poured over the knoll and flung themselves upon the soldiers. They were

brave men, those Mercians, and made a bold stand, slaying many of their savage foes, but the beasts were two to one and they had no chance against them. Some turned and fled only to be met by Eanhere and his host.

Soon there was not a soldier left alive, and that day for the first time the bear people feasted on human flesh, and liked it well. The brothers would have stopped them if they could, but what could two men do against eightscore of bears, fierce from the taste of blood. They gathered up some swords and went aside into the woods that they might not see the horrid sight.

"Eanhere, my vengeance is begun on Penda. I will not finish till Penda himself is dead," Wulfhere said.

"Alas, thou hast lost thine ax, brother," said his friend.

"The Mercian cut it through like a reed. The sword for me henceforth; I like it better. 'Tis ax and shield in one. I would I had a sword like Woden's, all these are toys." And he pointed to the heap they had gathered. "I want a sword as big as two of them."

"The one thou wantest then is Wiglaf's," said Eanhere.

"Tell me of it."

They sat down on a bank of grass.

"I told thee, brother," began Eanhere, "that my father who was murdered in his bed was brother's son to Ceaulin of Wessex who overcame the Hwiccas. There was among that nation a great sword wielded, in days gone by, by Ymner, a giant who lived in the days of the Britons among the mountains of Hwicce. It may be he lived in the very place where we live, friend. Thou hast seen those great stones piled one on another at the head of the path that leads down the mountain from our hut, forming as it were a great staircase with a wall in the midst and a wall on either side.

"Few men could even move those rocks today, yet there we see them piled high up. I will not say the giant Ymner built those walls, yet it may well be that he did. However that may be, when Dunwallo came first to this land he fought this giant and by a trick overcame him. The sword I speak of was Ymner's sword, and ever after Dunwallo wore it. At Worcester, seventy miles from here, he built his city, and he decreed that none should reign there after him but he who in straight fight

could win the sword from its owner. Moreover, none might be refused who claimed the right to fight for sword and kingdom.

"When Ceulin, King of Wessex, came against the Hwiccas he claimed that right, and being a strong fighter he won the sword and kingdom. My father too was strong, and since there were none in Hwicce that did not fear to fight him, they plotted as I told thee and took away his life by the hand of his girl-bride. I fled up here among the mountains, and though this place is in the Hwiccan kingdom yet are all men afraid to come here because the mountain is, they say, bewitched. Wiglaf, a man huge in strength and frame, now holds the kingdom and the sword."

"Hast never thought to pit thy strength against his and fight for the sword?" Wulfhere asked.

"Were I to put my nose in Worcester all men would know me and I should have short shrift, albeit I have a mind to try some day, for Wiglaf, I have heard, is much hated."

"It would be too great a risk, my brother, they would not let thee claim the right. Me they would allow. Now if thou wilt consent I will go and try my luck against Wiglaf, and if I win the sword thou art welcome to the kingdom."

"And if he kill thee, Wulfhere?"

"He will not kill me, but if he does then I shall have lost a sword and thou a kingdom."

"More than that, my brother, for I shall have lost a friend who is more to me than Hwicce. Better not risk it. I am not anxious to be king. Revenge I look for, not a throne. Methinks if they came now and placed the kingship in my hands I would not take it."

"Tut! Speak not so, Eanhere. But tell me, had thy father no other sons?"

"One other son he had, Eanfrith by name. He was a child when I left Worcester. Also he had a daughter. She must be seventeen years of age by this, if she still lives. I know not what has come of them. Without doubt they are dead."

Eanhere sat silent a long time, his mind occupied with many thoughts.

"Come, it is time to go back," said Wulfhere at last. "I would sleep on this matter of Wiglaf and tell thee in the morning what my plan will be."

Both men arose. They stripped the

armor from the bodies of Coelred and the tallest of the soldiers—the latter now half-eaten by the bears—and taking their weapons also in their arms they went back to the hut.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW WULFHRE SURPRIZES A FAIR NYMPH IN THE POOL NEAR WORCESTER

“**W**ITHIN the month I go against Wiglaf,” Wulfhere announced as they sat at meat together the next day.

“Good! I go with thee,” said Eanhere.

“That will not do, my brother, for consider, they will know thee and will kill thee, and seeing me with thee they will kill me also. I fear not death but I seek it not foolishly.”

“I have thought of a plan,” replied Eanhere. “I know of a berry whose juice will dye my hair and beard as black as a crow. I will also brown my face and hands. They will not know me then.”

“It is well,” said Wulfhere. “When do we start?”

“First go thou as near to the city as thou canst, my brother, and try to learn some news. It may be Wiglaf is away in some other part of the land. Better to find out first how things stand.”

“I will do so tomorrow.”

Wulfhere disguised himself on the morrow and went down to the village of Whichford, but little could he learn there except that Wiglaf had sent his summons for the head man of the village to meet him at his council-house ten days hence in Worcester.

“What does he at this council?” he asked.

“Many public questions are brought up,” the man answered, “and all his thanes and lords and head men discuss them with him. He asks them their opinions and advice in all these matters, then follows his own will; wherefore they are always much displeased.

“He is not loved then by the people?”

“Nay, he is hated for his tyranny.”

“There is a sword,” began Wulfhere, “that by an ancient custom—”

“Aye, stranger, but for many years none have challenged for it. Some did years ago, hoping to end Wiglaf’s life and tyranny together, but he overcame them and they

perished, they and their families. It is a serious matter, friend, to fight the king, for if he wins it means not merely loss of victory to the other, it means death to him and his. There are lords in Hwicce who fear not death for themselves, but they fear it for their wives and little ones.”

“Will none then challenge for the sword at the next council?”

“’Tis rumored that Earl Brian will do so. The king has worked him foul wrong and is determined to destroy him, yet he fears to do so. When Edwin of Northumbria drove Cadwallo of Wales through this land down to the coast, Wiglaf gave the Northumbrian Brian’s sister for his favor, to be his mistress. Now he will take Brian’s foster-daughter from him, whereat Brian is very wroth.”

“And well he might be,” answered Wulfhere.

He thanked the man for the information and passed on.

On the third day as he drew near to Worcester he saw on a hill above a pool a great stone house, and in the direction of the pool he heard a woman’s voice. Carefully and without noise he crept up to the bank where a little hedge hid him from sight. Quietly he put aside the foliage, and looking through he saw a sight that made his heart beat fast and his blood tingle in his veins.

On a rock that jutted out of the pool not thirty paces from him, sat a maid, unclothed but for a long white shift that being wet clung close to her well-rounded frame. Her fair hair hung like a golden mantle about her form and her bared neck and arms and shoulders shone like silver in the shade of the overhanging trees. One shapely limb glimmered in the clear pure water; the knee of the other was drawn up, and on it rested her small white hands and a face beautiful as Freya’s. Surely he had surprised a wood-nymph at her bath, or it may be Freya herself.

He saw the girl’s face gather in a frown. Her jaws gripped tight together. A look intent and almost fierce clung on her countenance. He saw her bite her lips and clench her tiny hands. Clearly she was thinking and they were not pleasant thoughts that passed through her mind.

And now she was speaking, softly at first so Wulfhere had to strain his ears to hear.

“Would that I were a man, then would

I kill this bully and his wizard! Are they all women in this land that they let Wiglaf work his will upon them? It would seem that now no longer is a man's daughter his own—we are all Wiglaf's to dispose of as he pleases. How many maidens has he forced from their fathers' side to be his concubines, or to be mistresses to other princes to win their favor! And now he will take me also and give me to his long-beard wizard.

"No, sooner will I be the bride of death and lie upon his bed, than sleep in the same house with Pellitus! I have a mind to fly to the haunted mountain, for I have heard that these two Bear-Brethren are men indeed. Would that I were the bride of one of them, for then I know they would defend me."

She ceased, and Wulfhære stepped from behind the bush. The sun shone full upon his great form and his fierce handsome face.

"Thou sayest truth, maiden," he said, "the Bear Brethren will defend thee!"

She gave a startled cry and slipped into the water, leaving only her head and shoulders above the surface. The pool made a poor shield for her white body, so clear and pure it was.

"Who art thou and what doest thou here?" she demanded angrily.

"I am Strong Arm, brother to him who sits on yonder mountain, and together we rule the bear folk."

"Thou liest! Get thee hence, fool! None but women may be seen here. One cry from me and thou art a dead man. Fly!"

"Nay, maiden, I fly not. Harken to me. I am him they call Strong Arm of the Bear Mountain. Behold these bear claws." And he held up a string of claws that he had loosened from his neck. "Sawest thou ever such claws as these? I brought them from the mountain of the bears and ever wear them. Thou art in trouble—tell me now how I can aid thee. I swear by my bear host that I will help thee. Speak now, fear not."

For a moment the maiden looked him in the face.

"Dost thou speak truly?" she asked. "Art thou the bear-man?"

"I swear it, maiden—by all the gods I swear it!"

"Then retire to yonder bush while I come to land and don my kirtle."

She pointed in the direction of a clump of bushes a hundred paces from the shore, rising slightly from the water as she did so, and exposing her fair rounded bosom. Wulfhære felt himself rooted to the spot.

"Go quickly!" she ordered.

He turned and went. Many times he hesitated as he went, and would have turned back. The animal in him cried—

"Seize her, she is defenseless, and carry her off to the mountain and make her thine."

But the manhood in him thundered—

"Nay!"

And he had not grown so much a beast that he was not even yet still more a man. He drew near to the bush and again he hesitated.

"Did she not say she longed to be the bride of one of us?" he asked himself. "I will go back now lest she change her mind," said Wulfhære the bear.

But Wulfhære the man said—

"Nay, thou didst come to help, not to dishonor her."

And Wulfhære the man prevailed.



IT WAS but a few moments until he heard her call, and went to her. He found her standing under a tree beside the pool. She was clad in a long rich kirtle of dark blue cloth edged with gold thread and lined with scarlet silk. A girdle of blue, its silver buckle inset with jewels, was about her waist, and her hair, still wet, hung in two long braids almost to her knees. Right queenly she looked as she stood there before him with head erect and eyes that gazed fearlessly into his. His evil thoughts vanished as he looked, and he bowed low before her.

"Lady, what is thy will?" he asked.

"Nay, Strong Arm the Bear, what is thine? I sought thee not," she answered.

"Nor did I seek thee," he replied. "By chance I happened here. I ask thy pardon for disturbing thee. Had I known thou wert in the pool I——"

He stopped.

"Thou wouldst not have looked," she finished for him. "Dost think I believe thee? I marvel then that thou didst stand forth boldly and look after spying through yonder hedge for I know not how long."

Wulfhære was much embarrassed. He felt like a clown before this damsel who kept her eye so constantly upon him.

"Lady, by the gods, I—I spied not, or if I did, I——"

He did not finish, for lying came not easily to him.

"Thou didst not mean to, eh? Then thou art sorry for thus spying on me?"

He looked into her face, and seeing a faint smile upon her lips his courage came again to him.

"Nay, by the gods," he said, "if I were to say I am sorry, I should lie. Not Freya's self could be more——"

"Enough!" she said sternly, but he could see that she was not at all displeased with his speech. "We have but little time to talk. If thou wert seen here it would mean thy death—and disgrace to me. I am in great trouble. Wiglaf would give me to Pellitus his wizard favorite, a man four times my age, despicable and evil. My foster-father Brian can do but little, I fear, to save me. There was a time when Wiglaf feared him, but now since Cadwallo, Brian's uncle, has been driven from his kingdom by Edwin of Northumberland, he fears him not, and everything he can do to injure him he does.

"My father will protest before the council at its next meeting, but I fear the lords will not dare to support him. My father says he will claim the right to challenge for the sword, if the council will not stand by him; but Brian is a small man and Wiglaf a great, and I fear Wiglaf will slay him."

"But lady—if thou wilt pardon me for saying it—thou art very beautiful; thou must therefore have many suitors for thy hand among the lords of Hwicce; is there not one who will stand up against Wiglaf on thy behalf?"

"Not one, Bear-man, they are all women; and yet they would be fools to try, for they know they are no match for Wiglaf. Not to fight for me means they must lose me, but to fight means to lose their lives also."

"Truly they excel in prudence but not in honor. What is there then to do, lady, and in what way can I help thee?"

She looked into his eyes, and he saw her face soften as she looked, and a tear began to form upon her cheek. She turned her head away and held her hand out to Wulfhere.

"Take me away, Bear-man. I know thou art strong and I can trust thee. I can not

stay here and bring death upon my father and his house, and shame upon myself. Take me away."

He took her hand and pressed his lips upon her fingers.

"Be comforted, my lady, this wrong will not come on thee and thy father—I swear it. I can not take thee with me, not now, lady, but I have a plan. Look on me!" He drew himself up to his full height as she turned her eyes on him. "Is Wiglaf as big and strong as I? I promise thee there will be doings at the council."

He kissed her hand again and let it go.

"My brother, why didst thou leave me here all unprotected?" she cried, and her tears fell fast as she sobbed.

"Hast thou a brother then?" Wulfhere asked.

"Aye," she answered, "but he fled from here and left me and little Eanfrith, and we were alone till Brian came and took us, and we became his children," and she sobbed again.

"It may be he will come back to thee, all in good time. But hark! I hear some one calling. I swear thou wilt never marry Pellitus. Wait here until the council meets. Wilt trust me, lady?"

She gazed on him through her tears.

"Aye, I will trust thee," she said, and she gave him both her hands. He kissed them, then took the necklace of bears' claws and clasped it about her throat.

"Wear this," he said, "until I come again to claim it."

He took her hands again. They looked upon each other for a moment, and Wulfhere thought he saw love in her eyes.

"Go now," she said, and drew away her hands.

The sound of the footsteps drew near, and he heard a voice—the voice of a woman—call, as he leaped among the bushes without hesitation.

"Who is with thee, Imogen?" the voice asked, and he heard her answer—

"No one; I but talked to myself."

The voices died away as he ran swiftly along the path he had come by.

Two days later he sat with Eanhere in the mountain hut.

"With what weapon wilt thou fight, my brother? Best take Broad Ax."

Wulfhere took down the sword of Coelred from the wall.

"I fight Wiglaf with this," he said.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW PELLITUS THE WIZARD WORKED A
MIRACLE BEFORE WIGLAF AND HIS
COUNCILORS

IN THE Great Hall at Worcester the councilors from all parts of the kingdom of Hwicce were gathered to decide matters of importance affecting the state. At the upper end of the hall on a dais sat Wiglaf, the king, on his throne, with his great sword girt at his side. A huge weapon this was, nearly five feet long, and very heavy. Beside the king stood his two sons, young men both, slightly over twenty years of age. Before him was a broad vacant space, and on either side of this, running parallel with the sides of the hall, were benches, three rows of them on each side.

On these benches, which were raised higher than those on the main floor of the hall, sat the king's earls and thanes and head men, some on one side some on the other. They were thirty-two in number. Nearest the right hand of the king sat Brian, Earl of Worcester, the most powerful of all the Hwiccan lords. Occupying the same position on the left side was the great Earl of Litchfield, Alhwine by name, of Saxon blood. Other notable men were the Earls of Chester, Shrewsbury, Hereford and Gloucester. These earls occupied the front benches, while behind them sat the thanes and behind these the head men.

In the body of the hall and below the raised floor on which the councilors' benches were, on humbler seats the freemen sat. They had no say in the debates, but had the privilege of hearing them and voting "Aye" or "Nay" on questions that were brought forward. Among these a great tall fellow with a long rusty sword hanging from his belt, and another not as tall but very broad of shoulder with a great two-bladed red ax across his knee, sat listening to the debate. They sat about half-way down the hall and seemed intensely interested in the proceedings, as indeed were all present.

The one craned his long body forward to hear the better, and the other pulled fiercely at a bushy jet-black beard. Many looked at them strangely as if to ask what business they had there, for though all freemen had a right to attend, few but the citizens of Worcester ever did.

It was clear that the matter under dis-

cussion was one of great interest to all there, for the speakers grew warm as the debate proceeded and angry threats were hurled from time to time from their lips.

Earl Brian rose to speak. He was a man of middle height, richly clad, about forty years of age. Refined and gentle he seemed, yet one look at his set determined countenance would show that behind all his gentleness and refinement there was strength of purpose and firmness of character. His speech was quiet and calm but full of earnestness and dignity.

"Lord King, it may be thou wilt say 'tis my relationship to the King of the Britons that makes me advocate his cause, yet there are better reasons than this for doing so. Cadwallo sails from Armorica with a great army that Solomon, king of that land, has given him to help him against Edwin. Even now he may be on the way. If he learn that thou art against him who will deliver this land out of his hand? Edwin has made no promise to aid thee. Before thou couldst get his aid Hwicce would be Cadwallo's. I say then that prudence cries out to thee to join the Briton king.

"But there is a stronger reason still for the alliance that I advocate. What has Cadwallo done to thee that thou shouldst go against him? Has he invaded thy land and ravaged thy borders with fire and sword? Nay, but Edwin has. Has Cadwallo burned thy towns and slaughtered thy people, outraged the wives and daughters of our nation? Nay, but the Northumbrian and his host have done this. Is honor dead in Hwicce that its king and lords will take this Edwin who has done them such foul wrong by the hand and call him brother? What have we to do with Edwin and his Angles?

"Is there one lord here who has any Angle blood in him? Some Saxon blood there may be but no Angle. We are at least three-quarters British here in Hwicce, and if my blood, my wisdom and my honor call on me to support Cadwallo, so do thy blood and the blood of all thy nation, as well as its honor and its best interests, cry out for an alliance with the Briton rather than the Angle. My voice is for Cadwallo. I have spoken."

He sat down amid a murmur of applause from some of those who sat around him. A tall red-bearded earl from the front row on the other side rose. He was the Lord of

Litchfield, Alhwine his name, of Saxon blood, an enemy to Brian.

"Lord King," he said, "it were great pity if the words of Brian were to go unanswered. Very fair they seem on the outside like the graves of our fathers, but look into those graves and thou wilt see dry bones and death; look deep into the counsel he has offered, I say, and you will likewise see nothing but death, death and desolation for this land and its people. Take his advice, I say, and in twelve months the name of Hwicce will be clean wiped out; for what are we that we can ever hope to stand against Northumbria?"

"Put no trust in Cadwallo; he is a broken reed and will only fail you if you lean on him, as he has failed you before. Did his fathers aid you when Wessex came against you and overcame you? Did Cadwallo help you when Edwin ravaged your land? He fled like a sheep before the wolf, as he will fly again. Earl Brian talks of prudence. Prudence demands, O King, that we side with the stronger, and that is Edwin. True he has done us injury, but will he not do us more if we side with his enemies? If we are with him he will do us none."

"Earl Brian talks of honor. Is there any honor in joining with a coward prince who would think nothing of sacrificing us to the enemy as he has done before if it suited his convenience to do so? He would but use us as catspaws to draw the hot Northumbrian chestnuts from the fire for him. Honor forsooth! This talk of honor wearies me. Honor demands that we side with Edwin if honor has any part or lot in the matter."

"He talks of kinship. There are many of us here who have much Saxon blood. Being Saxon, the Angles are our cousins. If then kinship has any say in the matter, some of us at least are bound to support Edwin. But what has kinship to do with it? If my own son once showed himself a coward his kinship would not save him from my anger. Or if the general weal demanded that he be sacrificed, it would not be for me to save him because he was my son. I say that kinship has naught to do with the question. I insist that honor has no say in this great matter."

"One thing we must consult and that is the safety and welfare of our land. We stand between Northumbria and the Britons. Edwin's host lies over the border,

Cadwallo's—if indeed he has one—far across the sea. Penda of Mercia, rumor says, is on his way to intercept Cadwallo when he lands. We have seen much of Edwin's strength, and we have witnessed much of Briton weakness. The safety of our land depends on our allying with Edwin. This is my counsel."

He sat down. Loud applause greeted his speech. It was plain the majority of the council were much impressed.

The king now arose.



"LORDS, Thanes and Head Men," he began, "with your good leave I would call up another to advise us. He is not of our council but his wisdom is great, and well may we listen to his words. He is Pellitus, come from Spain to Edwin, and from Edwin lately come to this city. He is a man well skilled in astrology and in the flight of birds. To Edwin he foretold all the disasters that befell that king when he took not his counsel."

"By him Edwin had witting of Cadwallo's raid, and was able to have his army ready and to close his ports against the invader. Three times did this Pellitus by his great wizardry raise storm and tempest that shattered Cadwallo's fleet. He is a right cunning sorcerer, and can raise spirits from the depths of hell to give him counsel. Is it your will that we call forth Pellitus?"

Brian stood up.

"Lord King," he said, "I am a Christian and will have naught to do with wizards and their sorceries, or with hell and its foul spirits. My trust is in the Lord of heaven and His Son."

Earl Alhwine also rose.

"King," he said, "it were foul shame for us to trust to wizards and demons to fight our battles for us. What need we more than our good swords? For me I have no faith in witchcraft."

Some however clamored for Pellitus and the king called him in. A curtain over the doorway at one side of the hall was thrust aside and the wizard entered. He was a little shrunken man of seventy-five years or more, with a long gray beard and hair that hung over his shoulders. He wore a peculiar pointed cap, and a scarlet cloak covered him from neck to heel. He strode forward with a slow gait of affected dignity till he stood before Wiglaf. Bowing haughtily he asked—

"What wouldst thou with me, O King?"

"We would ask thy counsel in a most important matter," the king said. "We stand between the deep sea and the devil; will we be burned if we go to the devil or will we drown if we go to the sea? Cadwallo sends word he returns with a great host to go against Edwin. He demands we join him. Either we must side with Edwin or Cadwallo. Resolve this riddle for us."

Pellitus was silent for a few moments, then in a dramatic tone he said—

"The stag asked of the serpent, 'The lion and the fox make war together—shall I side with the fox or with the lion?'"

There was a murmur of approval among the councilors, for well they knew that Edwin was the lion, the fox Cadwallo.

"Tell us, Pellitus, we pray thee, will the serpent be with the stag in this encounter?" the king asked.

"Aye, King, on two conditions—first that the stag must mate with the lion."

"Give us a sign, Pellitus, to show that thou canst help us, having the power. The lords here will not be convinced except a sign be given them."

The wizard smote the end of his staff on the flags. A flash of fire issued from it and a dense smoke puffed out and rose in a thick cloud to the roof where it rolled about among the rafters.

"Come forth, Scarmiglione! Come forth I command thee from the deep of hell! the wizard cried, stretching up his staff toward the cloud.

"What wouldst thou, Pellitus?"

The voice came from the cloud, deep and devilish it sounded.

"I command thee, tell me what will happen to Hwicce if she join Cadwallo?" the wizard asked.

"Destruction!" came the answer.

"And what if Wiglaf and his people join with Edwin?"

"Victory!"

"Swear now that this is truth!"

"I swear it by the beard of Satan!" was the answer.

"Enough, depart!"

All eyes were fixed upon the cloud above, and not till they saw it gradually disperse did they lower their eyes and fix them on Pellitus. Wonder showed on every face, and fear also on many. Pellitus passed out through the door he had entered.

"Say, now, my Councilors, do we go up with Cadwallo or with Edwin?"

"Edwin!" came the answering roar.

There was more potency in the wizard's logic than in all the wisdom of the lords of Hwicce.

"We join then with the Northumbrian," Wiglaf continued. "Be ready, Lords and Thanes and Head Men, at my call to put your companies in readiness to lead against Cadwallo. I warn you all"—and here he glanced at Brian—"let no ideas of kinship or false honor deter you from obeying. The findings of the council must be followed, and I, the king, will see that there is no rebellion. This matter now is settled."

Wiglaf sat down. All looked as he was speaking at Earl Brian, who only frowned and answered not a word.

A long silence followed during which some of the thanes spoke in an undertone to the king, and the lords whispered together.

At last Wiglaf made a sign, looking as he did so toward the door to the left of the dais. The curtain was pushed aside and once more Pellitus strode in and stood before the king.

"I would I could get my hands on that long-beard," whispered Eanhere.

"All in good time," replied his friend, "thy chance will come; but listen now."

CHAPTER XX

HOW WIGLAF SOLD THE BEAUTEOUS IMOGEN TO A WIZENED SORCERER

WIGLAF rose up once more, and raised his hand. The hum of conversation died away as he began to speak.

"There is another matter I would bring before the council," he said, and every one bent forward to hear what the king was about to say.

"Some twelve years gone a usurper ruled in Hwicce. He was slain, and by the free vote of the council I was elected king. That usurper had three children. The oldest—almost a man grown—after murdering two lords and an earl's daughter, fled, nor could our searchers by any means find him to bring him to justice, though a price was on his head. He is no doubt dead ere this.

"The youngest was an infant barely two years old, and the other a damsel of five years. Lord Brian took these two with my consent into his family and adopted them

as his children. The maiden is now of marriageable age. By the laws of Hwicce she is my ward, not having any kin. It is my wish that she be given in marriage to one who will presently plead his cause before you. Stand forth, Pellitus!"

The wizard who had stepped aside as the king spoke, now stood forward.

"Great King and Councilors," he began, "you will remember that when I gave my oath that I would support the arms of Hwicce against the Britons, it was on two conditions. The first was that you should ally yourselves with Edwin of Northumbria; the second condition let me mention now. The damsel that the king has spoken of is very beautiful. Now I am getting up in years and I would have a wife to comfort me in my old age. No doubt the maiden is ambitious. If so she can not well refuse me, for to be Pellitus' wife is to be bride to one who has a power that even kings have not.

"I can control the elements at will. I can call spirits from the depths of hell. The winds and waves obey my voice. There is naught that will stand against my magic. All this my power I freely place at the disposal of Hwicce, if freely ye will give the maiden to me. I have spoken.

He ceased and stepped aside, waiting for the king's reply. Wiglaf rose once more.

"Lords, ye have heard," he said. "We all have seen something of Pellitus' power. His magic is worth an army to us. Remember how by it he was able to discomfit Cadwallo in his war with Edwin, driving him with storms and tempests from Northumbria's coasts. To my thinking we can not well refuse his very moderate petition. The maiden is my ward by law. I am free to dispose of her without consulting you, but I desire in all things to have the approval of the council. How say you?"

Now many of the younger thanes arose and said it were great shame to give a maiden of her age to an old man; and one who was a Christian swore that he would try Pellitus' magic with his sword ere she should wed him.

Then Brian rose, and in a voice quivering with anger spoke.

"King Wiglaf, years ago when this maid was but a tiny child and her brother but an infant, their father slain, their elder brother fled, none of their kin left to guard and protect their weakness, left on the streets to

starve or beg their bread from any who would give them crusts to eat, my heart went out in pity to them, and I begged thy leave to take them and to raise them as my own. I was not of their race—I was a Briton, and had conspired with others to drive out the usurping Saxon and his line, but sorrow makes all men kin.

"I took them in, I say, I adopted them into my family; their guardian, their protector, their father I became, and none whose father lives is ward to any man. Wiglaf, this maid is mine! My daughter is she by thine own consent and by the laws of Hwicce. Take her away from me her foster-father and give her to this devil's scum, this vile impostor here, and thou doest me and her foul wrong. Mark me, King, it is a wrong I will not abide! I swear it by the Lord of heaven!"

The excitement in the hall was most intense; Earl Brian had hurled defiance at his king. Eanhere sank his fingers into Wulfhere's leg, thinking it was the bench that he was gripping. His comrade almost howled with pain.

"Hold, brother! What the devil meanest thou?" he growled in an undertone.

Before the king, whose face was red with wrath, could rise, Alhwine began to speak.

"Wiglaf," he began, "it is known well in Hwicce that I am no great friend to Brian, Lord of Worcester, yet I am a friend I hope to justice, and injustice will be done if Brian's daughter is torn from him against his will. If he consents to give her to Pellitus, well and good; if not, there is no law in Hwicce that can compel him. The maid is not thy ward; she is clearly Brian's daughter. Never with my approval therefore wilt thou do this wrong."

Wiglaf swallowed much of his wrath when he saw how much opposition there was in the council to his design, but one could see it only went the deeper for the swallowing, though it was not so apparent.

"My Councilors, there seems to be a difference of opinion as to whether the maid is ward to me or no," he said. "So be it, yet consider this—if she be not given to Pellitus he helps us not. One of these two then must be sacrificed. It is of the state that we must think. What is the happiness of a maid compared to the welfare of the state? The business of this council is to study the best interests of Hwicce, and not how best to satisfy the stubborn whims and fancies of a

girl. She is not going to her death; it is an honor that is offered her. As Pellitus' wife she will be great in Hwicce.

"Why hesitate to give her then, and so rob your land of a powerful defender? It may be that Earl Brian will be alienated, but is it not clear to all that though he has sworn to defend his land and king against their enemies yet does he mean to side with Cadwallo, their foe, in any case. The giving of his daughter to Pellitus can make no difference either way where Brian is concerned. Let me warn him—the way of traitors is a perilous way. Come, now, we have talked enough. Stand, ye who favor the wizard's suit."

With a clatter of arms many councilors stood up, some of them after much hesitation. Sixteen were counted standing and sixteen sitting. The king also stood.

"I vote for Pellitus," he said. "Bring in the maid."

 FROM a door on the right of the dais two women entered. The one was tall and dark and beautiful, her walk stately and full of grace. She was richly clad as became an earl's wife for she was consort to Brian, Earl of Worcester, and she held her head high as she walked. Her arm was about the form of a girl not quite so tall as she, a girl fair and beautiful also, and richly clad like her protectress. Unlike her companion she kept her eyes upon the ground as if she walked in sorrow and shame, but when she raised her head, Wulfhere could see the necklace of bears' claws about her throat.

Three times her gaze roamed around the hall as if she looked for some one, and the third time her eyes met his, and he saw her hand go up to the necklace. He raised his hand as a sign to her, and he thought he saw a faint smile on her face. He turned to speak to Eanhere but found him standing, his eyes fixed on the damsel. He laid his hand on his friend's sleeve.

"Sit down, Eanhere—it is the maiden that I told thee of."

Still Eanhere paid no heed.

"Sit down, thou fool, and gather up thy wits!" Wulfhere growled as he gripped his friend by the tunic and pulled him down.

Eanhere growled out an oath and then resumed his gaze. His friend too craned his neck forward to catch the words of the king.

"Damsel, it is high time that thou wert

wed," said Wiglaf. "I have chosen—or rather this council have chosen—a mate for thee, of whom we all trust thou wilt be worthy."

He motioned to Pellitus to stand by her. She drew her skirts away from him and stood up close to Brian's wife. The king looked frowning at her.

"Now swear the oath of service and fidelity that is required here; thy marriage will take place tomorrow."

"I would rather die," she murmured.

"Ha, a worthy daughter of thy foster-father. Knowest thou that disobedience to thy king is a most serious crime? Come, now, come. I give thee another chance. Swear!"

"Swear not!" said Brian quietly.

Wiglaf looked on him with a look of fury.

"Thy insults are intolerable, thou traitor!" he hissed. "Look, thou, thy time is coming!"

"I know it, false King," the earl replied.

"One more chance I give thee girl; now swear!"

"Nay, I will not!" she said firmly.

"Come, stand aside, we will deal with thee when we have finished our business!" he thundered. "What further business is there to be brought before the council?" he cried, as Brian's wife drew up with her daughter toward her husband's side.

And now Earl Brian rose.

"Lord King, there is a custom that for years back has fallen out of use, yet which is still one of the laws of Hwicce. I demand that thou hold up Great Sword and pronounce the challenge."

"That will I gladly do, Earl Brian, the more gladly if it be thou who answerest it," returned Wiglaf.

Here was a way to be rid of this haughty lord of his, and Wiglaf laughed a grim laugh as he held up the sword and began to pronounce the defiance. Wulfhere and Eanhere, and in fact almost all in the hall, were on their feet. As the king repeated the words the brothers saw Earl Brian unsheath his weapon. They saw Igerne his wife, hang on his arm, imploring him as it seemed not to take up the challenge. Imogen also added her voice to her mother's pleading, then stepping forward she loosed the necklace from her throat and looking down at Wulfhere she held it up to remind him of his promise. He waved his hand in answer as the king ceased.

All eyes were on Earl Brian as he prepared to accept the challenge, but ere the words came to his lips two voices rang out from far down in the hall, and two great men sprang out into the aisle and made their way up toward the throne.

"Back, Eanhere, the fight is mine! What madness seizes thee, my brother?" cried Wulfhere pulling at his friend's arm.

"The fight is mine—she is my sister," he replied, forcing his arm from Wulfhere's grasp.

They reached the steps that led up to the floor on which the councilors' seats were placed.

"I claim the fight, Lord King!" cried Wulfhere.

"Nay, I claim it, King—the right is mine!" shouted his brother.

The commotion in the hall was such that none could hear his neighbors' words.

"Silence!" roared Wiglaf above the din.

In a few moments quiet was restored.

"Now, who is it I am to fight?" the king asked.

Earl Brian stepped forward.

"It is I, King," he said.

"Good, I will fight thee!" cried Wiglaf.

While quiet was being restored, Wulfhere had been able to persuade his friend to allow him to fight first. If he fell then Eanhere would have his chance.

"Thou must survive, my brother, for thy sister's sake, and for this kingdom's," he said. "If I fight not first I swear thou art no longer my brother."

"Enough," replied his friend, "I will avenge thee if thou fall."

And now Wulfhere protested against the king fighting Earl Brian.

"I call on all here to bear witness that before Earl Brian spoke I had accepted the challenge."

"It is true, King," shouted some of the councilors.

They did not wish to see Earl Brian slain.

"But who art thou?" thundered Wiglaf to Wulfhere. "The king fights not with the common herd."

"I am Wulfhere, an earl's son and the grandson of a king."

"Clear a space!" shouted Wiglaf, "till I rid this boy of the life he wearies of. Afterward I will fight Brian!"

Two serfs dragged away the scarlet rug that covered part of the flagged floor, and the lords and thanes on either side pushed

back their benches to make more room for the fighters, while the audience of soldiers and citizens crowded forward to the steps of the platform where the antagonists stood. Brian stood back with his wife and daughter, and Eanhere took his stand on the platform steps, Blood-Ax ready in his hand.

CHAPTER XXI

HOW WULFHERE FOUGHT WIGLAF

WIGLAF was not taller than his opponent but he was of heavier build, a great huge burly man. He had not troubled to put on his shield, but his sword was full ten inches longer than Wulfhere's and must have weighed almost twice as much. Each flung off his surcoat, and as they stood ready to begin the fray men said—

"It will be a good fight."

"Wiglaf has put on too much flesh of late," said one. "Twill tell against him."

"Yet, nevertheless, he has the advantage," said another. "See the length of Great Sword, and its weight; the stranger's shield will never stand before it. See, too, he is but a youth."

"Aye, Wiglaf will win," said the first, and this seemed to be the opinion of most there.

Wulfhere stole a look at Imogen. He saw anxiety and thanks both written in her face as she raised the necklet to her lips and kissed it.

"Now guard thee, boy!" shouted the king.

Great Sword made a circle above Wiglaf's head, then swooped like a thunderbolt upon Wulfhere. Right well did the bear-man know how to ward such a blow. No shield squarely held against it could have stood the shock, for it was coming with the full force of Wiglaf's strong arms. Wulfhere's shield went up high to meet it before it could gather its full power. It caught the sword not squarely but slantwise so that it glanced off, but even then Wulfhere felt his left arm grow numb with the force of the blow.

Another blow came down and yet another. The huge weapon played about him scattering sparks from the bosses of his shield. Wulfhere used all his skill to dodge the strokes to save his sword-arm. His sword was almost useless in his hand. To oppose it to Wiglaf's would only mean it would be smashed. It was too short to reach the king's body effectively. More

than once he stabbed with it at Wiglaf, and more than once he touched him, but that was all.

"The lad does finely," said Alhwine. "I never saw such shield play, but presently his shield arm will give out and his shield also."

"The king begins to blow like a winded ox," said a man near Eanhere; "he is a great fool to work himself so hard."

"If the lad can but endure till Wiglaf grows tired then he will have some chance," said a thane to Brian.

"Pray God that he may," the earl replied.

The king was growing weary. He had hoped to overwhelm Wulfhere and quickly end the fight. He had failed in his purpose and now he must husband up his strength. His strokes grew gradually less frequent and less heavy.

And now Wulfhere, whose left arm was quite exhausted, began to use his right. He danced about the giant, pressing him now on this side now on that, keeping well out of reach of the still formidable swing of Great Sword, but landing more than one fierce stab under Wiglaf's guard. The Hwiccan allowed himself to be driven about from corner to corner till some of his old strength came back; then suddenly he gathered up all his remaining force.

Great Sword came down on Wulfhere's held up to ward it off, and smashed it into fragments. Another ponderous blow fell on Wulfhere's shield and cleft it in two parts. While the sword swung up for another stroke Wulfhere had leaped at Wiglaf's throat and plunged his dagger through his opponent's neck. It was all done in the twinkling of an eye, and before the people could realize it their king had gurgled out his life.

Wulfhere picked up Great Sword and stood leaning upon it to get his breath before Wiglaf's throne. In a moment Eanhere was at his side, Blood Ax swung on his shoulder. The uproar in the hall was terrible. Wiglaf's two sons charged at the brethren with their swords drawn. Great Sword and Blood Ax rose together, and the two sons of the king lay stretched upon the body of their father. A mighty pair they looked as they stood there in the sight of all the people. So Thunar and Woden must have looked when they went out to battle.

"So ho, my loyal subjects!" roared Wulf-

here above the tumult. "A new king is raised up over you by the gods—a new king and his brother! Are there any of Wiglaf's seed that will dispute our title? Are there any of Wiglaf's kin who would be as Wiglaf is? Let them come forward. Great Sword and Blood Ax wait to greet them with the kiss that giveth peace, peace and rest in the bosom of the gods. What? Ye that would sell a woman to a sorcerer, will ye not come to try our cheer?"

"Are there none among all the women-fighters here that will stand forth and fight with men? We are two brethren; choose ye any three and let them stand against us; four then—five—six! What! fear ye to fight six against two? Thou there, big skulking Saxon"—and he pointed to a huge red-faced warrior who slunk back from his gaze—"thou who turned traitor to thy race some twelve years since, come forth I say, and win the sword and kingdom for thy people!"

"Thou there my Lord of Hereford, or thou of Chester; is there no lord no earl no thane in Hwicce that will stand up for the sword? My Lord of Litchfield, thou art an honest man who companies with rogues—for this thou shouldst be punished. Stand forth! No? Then there is Pellitus." And he pointed to the wizard who was trying to mingle with the thanes about the door.

"Pellitus, thou mighty man of valor, come forth!" he called. "What, wilt thou not?"

He leaped with a great bound toward the wizard, right in among the thanes. With a bound he was back again dragging Pellitus with him.

"Come now, Pellitus, I would see thee call a spirit from the deep, or make a storm. Call up Scarmiglione again, and make him hang to yonder rafters and let him speak. Be quick, Pellitus!"

He gave the wizard's beard a tug that made him yell. His knees trembling with fear, Pellitus called the spirit as before and made him answer. Loud laughed Wulfhere whose eyes had been on the wizard's lips, not overhead.

"My lords of Hwicce, pardon my merriment," he said when he had had his laugh. "When next the devil talks above look on Pellitus' lips, I pray you. Now, Wizard, make the spirit talk once more."

Pellitus hesitated, but another tug of his long beard decided him. The voice was

heard above, but all could see it was Pellitus' mouth that spoke the words.

"Man, man! This throwing of the voice is a priest's trick in the land from which I come, a trick they use to make fools of the people as thou hast made of these. Come, curse me now, Pellitus, smite me with a sore leprosy, call fire down upon me, blast me with the breath of thy nostrils! Ha! ha! ha! ha! It makes me laugh to think how easily some fools are gulled."

He seized the wizard by the collar of his robe and shook him as one shakes a filthy rag.

"Oh, thou poor trembling wretch," he cried, "I would not soil my hands on such as thee to take away thy life. Go, get thee out of Hwicce! But first give me that hand thou wouldst have thrust upon this lady."

He seized the wizard's arm, and before Pellitus could realize what he was about to do he lopped the hand off at the wrist with Wiglaf's sword. The wizard shrieked and fled.



THE clamor in the hall had died away; all eyes were on the warrior and the wizard, and all listened in wonder to the strange dialogue. They felt ashamed to think they had been so easily deceived by the impostor, Pellitus, and hung their heads like children at Wulfhere's taunts. Who was this strange young man? His look was fierce but his dignity proclaimed him of the race of kings. He was but a youth yet his wisdom put them all to shame. He was stronger than their strongest, braver than their bravest, wiser than their wisest, more noble-minded than their noblest, for he alone had risked his life for a wronged maiden. They feared him, they respected him, they acknowledged in their hearts that whoever he might be he was worthy to be their king.

Wulfhere kicked the bloody hand aside and sat down on Wiglaf's throne.

"My lords," he said, addressing the councilors, "am I the King of Hwicce or am I not?"

Headed by Earl Brian two-thirds of the councilors stepped forward and owned him king. The Lord of Litchfield and the rest held to their seats.

Wulfhere addressed them.

"My Lords and Thanes and Head Men, what say ye?"

The Earl of Litchfield spoke.

"Noble youth, we own thee worthy to reign over us, and by the laws of Hwicce thou hast that right, but I and these with me will serve thee only on one condition. With whom dost thou ally thyself, my lord?"

"Cadwallo," Wulfhere answered.

"Then thou art not our king," returned the earl.

"As ye will," said Wulfhere. "Now get you to your several domains till I have time to attend to each of you. Begone!"

The earl and his colleagues arose and left the hall. The dead bodies had been removed, the blood-stains wiped up and the rug laid on the floor again, while these last events were happening. The women had retired also, and the audience had been dismissed from the hall. There remained now only the councilors who had acknowledged Wulfhere king.

"My lords," he said to them, "I came hither not seeking to be a king but only to relieve a maiden in distress. The gods have placed the kingship in my hands. I want it not. Besides, there is one here who has more right to it than I. Stand forth, Eanhere!"

Eanhere hesitated, then stepped forward. "Who is this man?" one asked in great surprise.

"The son of Cuthwine who fled at his father's death, no matter whither. Eanhere his name is. Behold him come again to claim his own."

The faces of the lords grew long and serious.

"The son of Cuthwine was very fair; how know we this is he?" asked one.

"He came disguised," Wulfhere replied, "his hair and beard stained black, his face and hands made brown with berry stain."

"We need more proof than this, Sir King," another said.

Wulfhere stood up and opened his friend's tunic, exposing a hairy chest whose fairness was in strange contrast with the black beard that hung over it.

"Behold, he has not dyed his chest, and see, lords, the royal mark of Hwicce."

They crowded around to look, then once more fell back in silence. The mark that proclaimed him heir to the throne of Hwicce was there, stamped on his breast.

"What is thy purpose, my Lord King?" the Earl of Gloucester asked.

"Why, man, it is to abdicate, and to give

up to my friend the scepter that by right belongs to him. I want not another man's property, much less my friend's."

The councilors looked one upon the other gravely, then Brian spoke

"Lord King, thee we can acknowledge as our ruler, for thou hast won the sword, and better still thou seemest worthy to rule us as king; but the line of Ceaulin is hated in this land. A price has been for years upon this young man's head for slaying lords whose sons and brothers still look for vengeance. True he slew in self-defense, and I for one could counsel that bygones be bygones. But never will they look at it that way, and never in their eyes will Eanhere son of Cuthwine be anything but an enemy.

"If he is king, all Hwicce divided as it now is, will be still more torn with division. Keep thou the kingdom, Wulfhere. The people love thy courage and manly wisdom. Long have we prayed for a king with just such qualities as thou hast. Keep the crown, and seek by firm but gentle government to heal the wounds of Hwicce and bring her unity and strength again."

Earl Brian's words were quietly applauded by the other councilors.

Then Eanhere spoke.

"Wulfhere, my brother, what the lords advise is best. Think not I want the crown though I am Cuthwine's son. Perhaps it is because I am his son I want it not. I do not forget the sight that met my eyes twelve years ago when going to my father's room I found him struggling for breath on his couch, the handle of a dagger resting on his breast, its blade deep in his body. Methinks just such a fate awaits me if I am to be king, and though I fear not death I like it not in that fashion.

"Nay, my brother, I will not be king. One who has lived like me twelve years among the beasts of the hills is no fit man to be a king, nor does he desire such an office. I will go back to the bears, my friend, and when thou needest me thou hast only to call and I will come."

"Tis nobly spoken, my Lord Eanhere," said Brian.

"Yet will I not be king," said Wulfhere. "While thou livest my brother I would feel myself a thief to be sitting in thy seat wearing thy crown. No, some other must be found to play that rôle. What is your counsel, lords?"

An old warrior, the Earl of Gloucester,

rose. He was a man not given to much speaking, but he had a name for wisdom.

"My Lord King," he began, "there is another who would, I do believe, be acceptable to all here—Eanfrith the son of Cuthwine, and brother of Eanhere. He is a youth of many noble qualities whom all the people love. He is a Christian as most of us are. His parentage has been forgotten, or forgiven him long since. Although Saxon by birth, under Earl Brian's gentle nurture he has become more than half a Briton; yet he is enough a Saxon to draw those who are Saxon in the kingdom to him.

"I do not see how these two factions, Saxons and Britons, can better be drawn together than by making him king who is akin to both. True he is but a lad of fifteen years and will not come of age for three years yet. Maybe Wulfhere will act as regent till that time. This is my counsel."

His words seemed wise to all there present, and on the third day after Eanfrith was crowned King of Hwicce with Wulfhere regent. Sweet was the meeting that took place between Eanhere and his young brother and the fair Imogen, his sister, but sweeter still in Brian's hall the greeting that Imogen gave Wulfhere. The two strolled out upon the walls overlooking the women's pond. They saw the shimmer of its crystal waters as the sun shone on it through the trees.

"Sec, 'twas there I met thee first," said Wulfhere. "I thought thee a goddess or a wood-nymph, so beautiful thou wert."

She blushed at the recollection, but smiled with pleasure, too.

"Wulfhere, thou didst not fail me; I would I could reward thee for thy service," she replied as she held the bear-claw necklet to her lips.

"Thou canst reward me, sweet Imogen," he said.

He put his arm about her and drew her close to him, nor did she say him nay.

"Give me thyself," he whispered.

"Take me," she murmured as she raised her face to his.

He bent his head and kissed her on the lips.



THEY were wed in the church by Christian rites though as yet Wulfhere was not become a Christian. She loved him much, Imogen did, in her strong passionate jealous way, but that same jealous passionate nature of hers was

doomed, alas, to work woe to them both. She bore him children, too, but of that hereafter.

More times than one was Wulfhere called upon to do battle for Eanfrith against would-be kings of Hwicce who challenged for the sword, but always Wulfhere won, till none dare face him. In those days little did his thoughts dwell on me his foster-father or Elflaeda whom he thought his sister; he was too busy going here and there marshaling the warriors of the land to prepare to join Cadwallo in his raid into Northumbria; but in the night he sometimes saw Elflaeda in his dreams, and sometimes spoke her name.

Sometimes he would wake, and sitting up he would gaze long upon the beauteous face of Imogen sleeping at his side, with the flickering rushlight shining on it, and he would wonder which had the greater beauty, the maiden with the raven locks or the woman with the golden; and he would ask himself—

"Which do I love the more?"

So Wulfhere spent the days and nights. As for Eanhere, he went back to his bears, and came but little to the court.

CHAPTER XXII

HOW PENDA BUILT A DAM

NOW things were happening in Mercia, lords, while Wulfhere was away. Penda had gone up against my nation, the East Angles, over whom Sigebert, the brother of Eorpwald, my father, was king, for my father's sons got not the crown as they thought they would. Penda defeated Sigebert in battle, but his losses were such he had to draw back again to Mercia. One, Felix, a bishop of the Christians, converted Sigebert and most of his people to the Christian faith.

Cynegils of Wessex against whom Penda had fought years before at Cirencester when neither was able to overcome the other, had as successor at his death, Kenwal his son. Now Kenwal had taken to wife one of Penda's sisters, but for some small cause he had divorced her and sent her back to Mercia. The King of Wessex came to Mercia in answer to Penda's challenge, but Penda met him with his host and smote him with a dreadful slaughter, driving him out of his kingdom.

Sigebert, King of the East Angles, retired to a monastery, giving the kingdom into the hands of his cousin Ecgric. As I have told you, lords, Penda had sworn to destroy my people, the East Angles. Again he invaded their land. They were in great fear, and not having confidence in their king, Ecgric, they persuaded Sigebert to leave his monastery and go to battle with them. This he did though much against his will, nor would he carry any weapon save his staff.

Now my nation, lords, was smitten in that battle. Sigebert and Ecgric fell and all their army, and Anna my father's brother became king. The people he had left were few. He could not hope to drive out Penda from East Anglia, therefore, he sued for peace.

"Ha, Edbert!" Penda said to me when Anna's messengers came and he had heard their message. "I have thy people now where I would have them. There will be mourning in East Anglia—or no—there will not, for I will leave none there to mourn. Anna will go the way of Sigebert, and all his land I'll drape in black. A shroud of fire will I weave for it, and its funeral pall will be a cloud of smoke. My oath must be performed. I thank the gods that now I am able to discharge it. Rejoice, Edbert, with me, for thou wilt be avenged also."

"Alas, King," I said, for my heart was sad, "how can I rejoice at the destruction of my people?"

He turned to me like a bear.

"Ungrateful fool!" he growled. "Have they not driven thee out? Have they not sought thy life? Have they not robbed thee of a crown? Have I not saved thy life and raised thee to high honor, and am I not about to avenge thy wrongs? But for me thou wouldst now be rotting in the Mercian hills with ravens croaking on thy bones. Art thou turned Christian that thou no longer lovest revenge?"

I answered him not lest my words might only enrage him the more.

That night he sent Anna's messengers back with the word that Anna and his men must meet him on the second day at the place called since the Field of Death, to treat for terms. Now on the east side of that field the river runs deep and turbulent, the bank being a high precipice. On the west there is a long low hill. The King of Mercia's men took up their stand next to the hill in a long line, and waited for Anna's

coming. The second day came and there was no sign of the East Angles. On the morning of the third day their front appeared, and Penda watched them as they came, himself standing on a little knoll.

"Behold thy people, Edbert!" he said to me.

"They are my people, King," I answered.

"How many be they?" he asked.

"Not many, King; perhaps four thousand men."

"Four thousand! More than that, Edbert; but see, what bring they with them?"

I shaded my eyes from the sun and looked. Behind Anna's men I saw a motley host of figures coming slowly down the pass.

"Now by the gods! What mean they by bringing with them their wives and children?" I cried.

Penda clapped his hands together and laughed aloud.

"The more the merrier!" he said. "Edbert, seest thou yon river?" And he pointed to the east of the plain on which we stood.

The ground where we were standing was high, and I could see the glimmer of the water below the precipice.

"I see it, King; what of it?" I asked.

"Why only this, I have a mind to dam it."

"To dam it, King—why dam it?" I exclaimed.

"'Tis but a fancy that I have," he replied.

"I was just wondering if there were enough in yonder host to dam that river."

I looked at him a moment and saw a sneering smile on his fierce face. A thrill of horror passed through me as I discerned his intention.

"Hearken to me, Edbert," he said. "Yon stream is small and its banks are very narrow—dost think these people are enough to stop its flow?"

"Surely thou dost jest, O King," I muttered.

"Ha, ha, my friend," he laughed, "thou dost not always see my jokes. I am glad thou seest this one. Hearken! It is my will thy people should be damned, and if they dam this stream in the way that I intend that they should dam it, then are they damned in right good earnest, and devoted to the gods. I trust the gods will thank me for the offering. They are an accursed race, friend Edbert.

"Remember they have left their faith and now worship the gods of the Christians.

Am I not my gods' champion, and do I not right to stamp out this false faith? 'Tis bad enough to be a Christian, Edbert, but to be renegade to Woden is far worse. There will not one of these base renegades survive—I swear it!"

King Anna's host were soon on the plain before us. Along the river women and children to the number of ten thousand sat or occupied themselves in arranging the baggage they brought with them. Between them and us were drawn up Anna's soldiers.



A VENERABLE old man with long gray hair and beard, accompanied by two warriors, his generals, came toward us as we stood on the knoll. The old man saluted Penda and bent his knee before him. Penda took his hand and raised him up.

"Rise, Anna; thou art a king as I am, and true kings kneel only to the gods," he said.

"Great King," said Anna, "I come with all my people to ask mercy at thy hand. Of late years we have had much war; war and bloodshed and slaughter has been our portion. We are sick unto death of it and would have peace. Our crops lie trampled and ungathered. Our children cry for bread. Wives mourn their husbands slain, and children their fathers. As thou wouldst have mercy of the God of heaven, show mercy to us."

Now I thought this a strange way to treat for terms. He had exposed the weakness of his nation.

"What terms hast thou to offer?" Penda asked.

"We will acknowledge thee our overlord," the old man answered. "We will pay tribute in men and money, and assist thee in thy wars. We will guard well thy eastern borders for the while thou art waging war far in the west. If this is not enough we will do more. Only tell us what it is and we will do it."

"But if I refuse all thy terms, what then?"

"Thou canst not refuse, Penda, for did not thy message say that thou wouldst come to terms with us?"

"Aye, so I said, King Anna—on the second day, I said, but it is now the third."

"Yea, King, it is the third, but though we made all haste we could not come here sooner with all our wives and little ones."

"Who told thee to bring thy wives and children?"

"No one, Penda, but we brought them with us thinking that the sight of their distress would move thee to pity if naught else would. See them, Lord King, and spare us for their sakes not for our own."

"Are they all here, King of the East Angles?" asked Penda. "Methought thy country had more folk than this."

"All that are left are here," Anna answered; "starvation and the sword have wiped out all the rest. What of thy terms, King Penda, I pray thee tell us?"

The king drew himself up and a look of cruel triumph came over his face. He scowled as he answered:

"King of the East Angles that comest to me like a woman to beg mercy at my hand; that putteth the lives of thy wives and children in great danger to save thy own; thou and thy people have turned renegade to the gods whose cause I champion. Ye people of East Anglia who thought not of mercy when ye burned my lands and pillaged and slaughtered my people. There are homeless starving ones in my dominions, there are widows and orphans there who cry aloud for vengeance on your nation. Shall I disregard their voice and hearken to thee, King Anna? Not so, by Woden, god of battles!

"My land which thou hast desolated, my people whom thou hast made to mourn, my gods whom thou hast shamed and dishonored, all call to me to spare thee not. Some forty years ago, King Anna, I and my mother craved food at the hand of thy people when we were wanderers in thy land. The sacred law of hospitality they disregarded, and drove us forth like dogs. I swore an oath then to destroy thy nation, and by the gods I will destroy it! Go back, thou renegade, to thy people there, and bid them fight! One hour only do I give them and thee to prepare. I make no terms with such as thee."

The old man did not quail before the scowl of Penda, nor did he tremble at his words.

"Thou man of blood," he cried, "who dearest in dealing out death, behold it is written, 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed.' Thou who showest no compassion on the fatherless and the widow, behold strangers shall dishonor thy wives and dash thy children against the stones. Thou that showest no pity—no pity will be shown thee in thy need. With

what measure thou metest, it shall be measured to thee again. False, perjured king, who hast led us into a trap here to destroy us, the Lord requite thee!"

He turned with his captains and left us standing on the hill.

"Old fool, to put his head into the lion's mouth!" the king growled. "Let us see now if his new gods will help him."

I heard a cry go up from Anna's army and saw men pointing north and south. I looked in those directions and saw the ends of Penda's lines bend slowly in toward the river. Soon they had reached it and Penda's host had closed in like a bow, the river being the bow-string. There was no escape now for my people; they were hemmed in on the north and south and west by Mercians, and on the east the rocky precipice shut off any escape in that direction. I saw now Penda's plan: it was to drive these wretched victims over the bank into the stream beneath.

I saw the East Anglian captains put their soldiers in array. I heard their king exhort them to fight bravely. The chant of the Christian priests rose up to heaven as they prayed their God to help them. Then Penda's horn rang out, and the Mercians, already in battle-form swooped down upon their victims. Ah, lords, how can I tell you of that butchery? The shouts of men, the screams of women, the shrieks of children—I hear them still; they ring yet in my ears.

I saw mothers grab their little ones and leap with them into the chasm. I saw strong Anglian warriors, driven to the very verge, seize hold of Mercian soldiers and drag them over with them, fighting still as they fell. I saw a common soldier smite old Anna on the head, then heave his body over into the stream. Two Anglian warriors I saw standing side by side behind a heap of slain. They were my brothers, the very ones who tried to kill me years before. They were grown partly gray now as I was, but I knew them. They had grown brave, too. I could have yelled with joy as I saw them smite down all who came against them.

Then Penda saw them. With an oath he was upon them. Not at once did he overcome them, for smiting both together at him they brought him to his knee, and perhaps he would have died had not my shield covered him. Soon he was up. The smaller of the brethren he soon slew, then

after some fighting drove his sword-point through the body of the other. I had no cause to love my brothers, yet my heart ached as I saw them fall. I followed Penda here and there to shield him when he needed shielding, which was often, for he was ever reckless of his life; but not a blow did I strike against my people.

Soon it was over. Manfully the East Angles fought, but it was against fearful odds. Penda's lords would have spared the women and children, but Penda's orders were that all should die. As it was the lords took no part in the slaying of those helpless ones. The common soldiers hurled them over to their death, then gathered up the slain men also and cast them down.

 WHEN all was over and I was seeking out a place where I could go and weep, the king sent for me. I followed him with heavy heart down to the edge of the stream. We walked along the precipice perhaps a hundred yards, I with my eyes upon the ground as we went. Suddenly he stopped.

"Behold the dam!" he said.

I looked, and there where the river gorge was narrow—the walls of rock on either side being not ten paces apart—there was a dam of human flesh and bone. A great oak with many branches had fallen across the channel down near the water. The bodies floating down had caught in this obstruction and piled up as the water rose. There was a wall of human bodies full thirty-five feet high—God knows how thick—with the water falling in small streams every yard or two over the top. Above the dam the water was not five feet below the level of the bank; below it was quite forty.

A body with face upturned came floating down the current in our direction as we stood above the dam. It struck the wall of corpses not six feet from where we stood, its ghastly grinning face turned toward us, and its glaring eyes causing even Penda to turn away. The current caught it and it sank deep down beneath the waters, leaving only bloody bubbles floating on the surface.

"Pah! Didst see it, Edbert?" Penda exclaimed. "It was the man who nearly slew me an hour ago. Thou didst save my life that time, my friend. Knowest thou who that brave fighter was?"

I leaned against a tree in agony.

"He was my brother, King," I said.

Penda stood long in silence gazing at me as I leaned against the tree for strength to support me, for I was well nigh fainting with horror and sorrow.

"Edbert," he said at last, "'tis something to let one's brother die to save one's king. It goes far to prove thee faithful; yet was this brother one who tried to end thy life once on a time—is it not so?"

"It is so, King," I said.

"Think not that I am not thankful to thee, Edbert," he went on, "but wouldst thou sacrifice one dearer to thee than a brother for my sake?"

"No doubt, great King."

"No doubt, no doubt," he repeated; "does that mean that thou wouldst?"

"Aye."

"Edbert," he continued, "I am minded that my oath to the gods was to wipe out all thy people; now a king's oath is sacred—is it not so?"

"Aye, if——"

"If me no ifs, Edbert. Thou sayest my oath is sacred; then must I carry it out lest the gods be displeased."

"Thou hast fulfilled it, King."

"Are all thy nation dead then?"

"They are all dead."

"Not all Edbert."

"There is one, King, who is not yet dead."

"I would know what one thou meanest, friend."

"Myself, Edbert," I replied. "See, there is room down there. If I were there I might help stop a gap. For thy oath's sake, King, slay me."

"Nay, Edbert, thou wilt remember that when I swore to kill the rest I swore also to save thee."

"True, King, then all are dead. Of what use then to stand here in the shadow of that horror there and talk light empty words? Let us be going."

"Not yet friend, Edbert. Another of thy nation lives—thy sister. Methinks I see her coming hither."

I looked up and beheld Cyneswithe walking toward us, with two soldiers following close behind.

"What wouldst thou with me, King?" she asked.

"Hearken, Cyneswithe; long years ago when a child I wandered in East Anglia, I and my mother. We were hungry then—it was long before I was a king. Thy people

would not give us milk to quench our thirst, nor bread to eat. Edbert alone gave us some milk. I swore before the gods a solemn oath that all thy race should perish—all save thy brother. Now when I told my oath to Anna and his people they said, 'It would be wrong, great King, not to fulfill thy word; see, we will fulfil it for thee,' then all together running down here to the river they hurled themselves into the stream. Behold them!"

He pointed to the dam. She looked and shuddered.

"Now, wife," he went on, "Edbert assures me that my oath must be kept, and that it is not kept so long as even one of thy race lives. There is one yet alive—and thou art she. Go then to thy brother and talk over this matter as once thou didst talk over another matter with him—a matter that concerned a child, Cyneswithe."

She turned toward me, and together we walked a little way apart, then she spoke.

"Edbert, my brother, it is the last talk we shall have together. The time is come when I must die. I told thee not long since it would be so. Now swear to me that for all the wrongs this man has done us and our people thou wilt take vengeance."

"I swear it, sister!" I said, and I ground my teeth.

"Swear also that thou wilt make search for my son, Wulfhere, and when thou findest him thou wilt tell him of my love for him and let him know all the story of his birth. I would not have him live until he die not knowing that I was his mother."

"I swear it, Cyneswithe!"

She took my hand and kissed me, and for a moment she lay in my arms.

"My sister, thou shalt not die," I whispered hoarsely; "I will slay him! I will plunge my dagger in his throat! I will do it now, now, my sister, and save thee!"

"Nay, Edbert, he is armed and thou hast not even a knife," she answered.

I looked down at my belt and saw it was even so.

"Besides, it would be of little use," she continued; "they would soon kill thee and me also. Wait—wait, my brother, the time will come and shortly and then thou wilt act. His cup is not yet full. As for me I would not live now if I could. I weary of this life, 'tis worse than death to live as I have lived. I long to rest. Mayhap there is another world where thou and I, my

brother, can be happy. Kiss me, my brother, and farewell."

Once more she kissed me, then walked to the king. She stood before him with her proud head thrown back, and looked him in the eyes till he turned his own away. At last she spoke.

"In an evil day I met thee, Penda, and ill have I slept since coming to thy house. Fiend that thou art, from this day onward will I haunt thee till the sharp javelin lays thee low, and thy evil soul goes out into the world of devils. Farewell!"

She ceased. I turned my eyes away. The sound of a heavy splash came up from the river far below. I put my hands over my ears and fled whither I knew not, till my strength was spent; then falling on the ground a darkness came about me and I knew no more.

CHAPTER XXIII

PENDA SEES A SPIRIT

PERHAPS two moons had come and gone, when there came a stranger to Penda's court asking to see the king. He was shown into the Great Hall where Penda sat with some of his captains, myself being also present. We were talking of the war he wished to wage against Cadwallo.

"His is a Christian nation, and himself the chief champion of the Christ; great praise would we get from the gods if we could overcome Cadwallo. What know ye of him, lords?"

"He is known to be a crafty, cunning prince who conquers more by trickery than by straight fight," said one.

"Cruel is he too in times of war," another said. "There is no more barbarous king than he in all England."

"It is thy will, King, to be master over both Cadwallo and Edwin of Northumbria," I said. "I counseled thee some months since to wait till these two had exhausted their strength one on the other, for they were at war. I have lately heard that Edwin has badly beaten the Briton, but has not followed up his victory. Cadwallo, they say, has gone to Armorica to seek help of Solomon, king of that land."

"Let us strike then at the weakest, which is Cadwallo. A fine chance for us now that he is out of the kingdom," said Penda.

It was agreed that Penda's fighting-men

should be called once more together, and a raid made into the Briton's territory.

It was now that the stranger was announced.

"Show him in!" ordered the king.

He was a small, thin man with a great long beard, and must have been full seventy-five years old. He was clad in a peculiar garb, with a pointed cap which he now carried in his hand. His long hair reached his shoulders and his scarlet cloak fell to his ankles. His right arm was wrapped in a white bandage. He bowed to the king and his lords, and at Penda's command began to speak.

"My name, King Penda, is Pellitus—Pellitus the wizard. I have great powers, noble King. I can bring storms and tempests on the land. I can read thy fortune in the stars, and from the flight of birds I can tell thee of events that will come to pass. I can call spirits from the depths of—"

The king sat up.

"Call me a spirit, man—I would see a spirit," he said.

"I can not show it thee, Lord King, but I can make it speak to thee so thou wilt hear its voice," Pellitus answered.

"Then let me hear its voice."

Pellitus smote his staff upon the floor. A flash of flame and a sharp report, then a thick smoke burst with a puff from the end of the stick. It rose quickly up to the roof of the hall, and rolled about there in many fantastic shapes. All eyes were on the cloud of smoke above—all eyes but mine, for well I knew this trick. As a priest I had often seen it practised, though for myself never could I throw my voice, as indeed very few could; and so I never practised it. My eyes, I say, were not upon the cloud but on the wizard's lips.

"Come forth, Scarmiglione!" Pellitus shouted.

"I am here, Master; what wouldst thou with me?"

The voice came from the cloud.

"I would have thee answer whatsoever the king asks," said the wizard.

"Let him ask on," the spirit answered.

Penda was too much taken by surprize to have a question ready.

"Ask if we ought to make war against Cadwallo first or against Edwin," I said.

The wizard put the question to the spirit.

"Go up against Cadwallo and overcome him," was the answer.

The king was highly pleased, as were his lords. They asked the spirit many questions and were amazed at the wisdom of the replies. I almost laughed outright. King Penda saw me and asked me in an undertone why I laughed.

"Ask the spirit another question, then watch the wizard's lips," I whispered.

"Ask Scarmiglione what success Cadwallo is having in his mission to Armorica, and what allies he will have in England," he ordered.

"Thou hearest the question, Scarmiglione; answer the king!" the wizard commanded.

"Ill success in Armorica," came the reply. "Wulfhere Great Sword of Hwicce will aid Cadwallo."

King Penda laughed aloud, then whispered to me—

"Say not a word of this deception to the lords."

All looked at him to find why he was laughing.

"I laugh for joy," he said, "because the gods have given Cadwallo into my hand. Sir Wizard," he continued, "there are lying spirits as well as spirits of truth; which is this one of thine?"

"He speaks truth, king; he never fails me."

"Good!" said the king. "Then we shall conquer. But who is this Great Sword thou speakest of—I mean that thy spirit mentions." And he laughed again.

Pellitus told him all that had happened that day at Wiglaf's court in Worcester, and how Wulfhere had smitten off his hand.

"It is a marvel thou didst not call a storm upon his head," said Penda, "but that is thy business. Tell me now, what men has he, what flocks, what herds, what riches?"

Pellitus told him all, magnifying the flocks and riches of Hwicce, but not exaggerating the number of Wulfhere's fighting-men. When he had done, the king spoke.

"Hearken, Pellitus, to what I say to thee. Thou wilt go to this Great Sword and wilt say to him, 'There is one Penda the Strong of Mercia, who dwells in Wodensburg, who would fight thee for thy sword and for thy kingdom, albeit it does not fall in with his humor to go to Hwicce at this moment. Come thou, Wulfhere Great Sword, to Wodensburg, come and delay not, lest if thou delay he come and fetch thee!'"

Now Pellitus feared greatly to go to Hwicce again, remembering what had befallen him there. He spoke, therefore, to the king of the length of the way, and how it were better to send another.

"Begone!" Penda roared. "I give thee just one month to make the journey and return. If thou stand not before me in that time I swear to search thee out and use Great Sword upon thy head! Moreover, Pellitus," he added, "I will see the girl is thine. Now, go!"

The wizard bowed and left the hall, promising to obey the king's command.

Now it was in Hwicce that I lost my foster-child, Wulfhere. Could it be possible that this Wulfhere Great Sword was he? 'Twas barely possible, I thought, yet most unlikely. How could Wulfhere my son be reigning in Hwicce? I could well imagine him fighting Wiglaf for the sword, but I could not imagine him, a Mercian, reigning over a land of Britons and Saxons. I dismissed the thought as being well-nigh impossible, yet I determined to find out more about the matter when opportunity offered.

Penda's council adjourned, all talking in excited tones of the marvelous work of wizardry that Pellitus had performed.

 PELLITUS traveled on to Hwicce to Wulfhere's court at Worcester. He traveled fast, for though old he was strong and used to journeying; moreover the fear of Penda lent him wings, and the hope of winning Imogen spurred him on. He feared Wulfhere and was in doubt as to the reception he would get, but as an emissary from a powerful king he felt he would be safe from harm. He could not hope that Wulfhere, who was afraid of neither man nor devil, would obey the summons Penda sent, but he would have the satisfaction of spreading consternation among the lords of Hwicce, who would, perhaps, force Wulfhere to abdicate, or else obey the challenge.

He felt they were much stronger for Hwicce and themselves than for Wulfhere, and would not risk the danger of invasion and sure destruction at the hand of Penda.

What happened him at Worcester I need not now relate. In due time he appeared in Penda's hall, two days before the month was up. His coat was torn into ribbons, his feet were bare, his cap was gone—also his staff. His long beard was clipped off close

to the chin, and one side of his face and head was shaved. He was in a sorry plight, and a great roar of laughter went up from the king and his lords when they recognized him.

"So, most potent wizard, thou hast returned—or part of thee!" laughed Penda. "Did the storm thou didst raise blow off thy hair and beard?"

"Nay, King, but those thrice-cursed men of Hwicce have done this—ten thousand fiends devour them!"

"Why didst thou not call up a spirit, Pellitus? Where was thy friend, Scarmiglione, when these men so abused thee?" I asked.

"Scarmiglione forsook me in my need," he said. "When I have leisure I will punish him as he deserves—the slave!"

"He is a spirit; how then canst thou punish him?"

"I'll cork him in a vessel; spirits love not to be confined in bottles. But let me tell thee, King, of my mission."

"Say on, Pellitus," Penda replied. "Does Great Sword come to lay his weapon in my hand?"

"He comes not, King, but casts defiance at thee."

"He does, does he? Tell me now his words."

"These are his words, great King; 'Go back and say to Penda, known in Mercia as Penda the Strong, in other lands as Penda the pagan murderer of women and children, if thou wilt have Great Sword come hither and fight for it. There is one here who longs to strike a blow at thee, thou tyrant, to avenge the blood of his people whom thou hast murdered.'"

Penda sprang up in a great fury, his rage so great that he could not speak for a moment. He shook his javelin in his hand and shouted:

"The dog! The son of a dog! That dares to bark at me after this fashion. The cub from the mountains that sticks out his tongue in my face! I will go to him indeed and will flay his hide from off him, and of it I will make me shoes to walk on! Make ready, lords; tomorrow we march to Hwicce to root him out and his people."

The lords looked one upon another in amazement.

"Take this rat of a wizard that dares to speak such a message! Cut off his ears and whip him from the court! By the life of the

gods no man may speak such words before me and escape unscathed!"

Two soldiers dragged the shrieking wizard out of the hall, and did with him as the king ordered.

"Prepare my regiment of guards for service tomorrow, Immin," Penda commanded. "At even we march for Worcester."

He stamped out of the hall.



THAT night the king slept little. He called me to his bedside in the morning and I saw that he had something on his mind to tell me. His face was pale and haggard and his eyes glazed and starey.

"Come hither, Edbert, I would speak with thee," he said.

He wiped the sweat from his face with his hand and bade me sit at the foot of his couch.

"Edbert, I have dreamed a dream," he said, "an awful dream if dream indeed it was. I saw thy sister Cyneswithe, my wife, standing there just where thou art. Her dress clung to her body and water dripped from it to the floor. *Drip, drip*, I heard it plain as ever I heard water drip. Look, Edbert, on the floor behind thee; tell me—is there water there? Myself I fear to look."

I looked. There was a damp mark on the flags about two feet across.

"Tell me, Edbert, is there water there, for if there is I know the vision was no dream but real?"

"There is a damp mark, King, but——"

He sat up suddenly in bed and grasped my arm, a wild look in his eyes.

"Art sure, Edbert?" he whispered hoarsely. "Look again!"

I had no wish to spare him—cruel murderer of innocents that he was—but I felt a pity for him in his terror, and tried to calm him.

"See, King, the rain has leaked down through the roof," I said, pointing upward above the damp spot on the floor. "Look, one can see the stains of it on yonder boards."

"But it rained not last night?"

"Aye, King, it did."

He looked, and sank back on his pillow with a groan of relief.

"Thy sister stood, I say, just where thou art, her garments dripping wet," he con-

tinued. "She looked at me with sadness in her eyes, and I heard her say—

"Penda, thy cup is nearly full."

"She came up close to me, her great eyes staring close into my face, and laid her wet hand on the cushion, then slowly faded from my sight. See, here she laid her hand."

He partly raised himself and pulled the pillow forward, then shrieked out:

"See! See! The wet mark where she placed her hand!"

I looked, and there, sure enough, the pillow was quite wet. The sweat stood out in beads upon his brow; his whole frame shook with terror.

"She swore she would haunt me!" he cried. "She promised she would do it!"

"Be comforted, King," I said gently, "This wetness on the pillow is nought but sweat from thy own brow. See, it pours down thy face; there was no spirit here, 'twas but a dream."

"Thinkest thou so, Edbert?" he asked eagerly. "Perhaps thou art right, Edbert, perhaps—perhaps thou art right. I trust it is as thou hast said."

He sank down on the pillow again.

"Stay with me, friend," he said. "It may be that now I can get a little sleep. I trust thee as I trust few other men. Stay by me while I sleep."

I gave him a drink of water from the pitcher by the couch. He thanked me and then closed his eyes.

"Edbert," he said, "I loved—thy—sister. Edbert, I have done—thce and her—foul wrong, and—now her——"

He muttered something more than I could not catch, and then he slept.

I leaned over and watched him as he lay, and a fiend whispered in my ear—

"Now, Edbert, smite!"

We were alone. I could have sunk my knife into his heart and left the room with none to see me go. Never might I have as good a chance again. My hand went to my belt and rested on my dagger-hilt. He turned his face toward me in his sleep, and I looked long upon it. The fierceness of it had quite vanished and in its place were lines of care such as men have who many a time have had the heartache. Monster though he now was, no doubt there was a time when as an innocent infant he looked for love from those about him, but little love did he find.

Cast out at an early age by his own

people, and made to wander many months and years from place to place with only his mother who never loved him but only mourned his sorrows; enduring in those tender years hardships, hunger, perils, abuse, is there much wonder he had turned against the world and his better nature shriveled up like parchment in the fire? He had been tutored in the life he led. He had not been taught in his youth to love, to show mercy, gentleness, charity. He had been taught the very opposite, and he well learned the lesson that they taught him.

Ah, lords, what a wicked world it is! How many a little child there has been, with splendid powers of mind and body, powers that with a little care and love might have been made in after life to serve the race, but by abuse and cruelty have been made to curse the world. I never knew a braver, stronger, cleverer man than Penda, except it were Wulfhere.

He was born to lead and influence men. Ah, what a force for good his great gifts might have been if he had been taught to use them aright.

He was not taught so in his youth, nay, quite the opposite, and for generations yet to come this land will groan because of his misdeeds. A little care, a little love when he was young, and England would have blessed his memory. Today his name is spoken with a curse.

Near as I had been to Penda—and no man had been for years so near as I had—I never saw aught but the wild beast nature in his face. In the thick of the battle 'twas the lion that I saw there. When dealing out his horrid penalties it was the wolf that looked out from his eyes. When roused to wrath he was a very tiger; when peeved he was a bear; and fox was written on his features when he was scheming to outwit his enemies.

Brave as a lion, cunning as a fox, fierce as a tiger, ravenous as a wolf and cross as a bear—that was great Penda in my eyes. I never saw that careworn look before that I saw now. Could it be possible that beneath that fierce exterior his better nature still was struggling to get to the surface? It may be so. However that may be he had the look of the dying stag upon him now. The tiger and the lion, the fox and wolf and bear had vanished from his face, and in their place was sorrow, deep and tender.

A great pity for him welled up in my

heart, and in that moment I could have wept for him—for him who slew my sister and my people, and wrought me untold wrong. I took my hand from my knife-hilt, and waited. For full two hours he slept—then woke.

“Ha! Edbert, my friend, I have slept well at last. It is the first good sleep I have had since—since she went from me, she who came back to haunt me in the night. I do not feel well, Edbert. Tell Immin I will not go to Hwicce for some days. If the gods will we go in five days or a week. But hearken, Edbert; take thou twenty men and go to Worcester as my emissary. Tell thou this pup called Great Sword I will be with him anon.

“Say to him it were well to make submission now, and send me hostages. I will not treat again with him, tell him that. Also I have a fancy for that sword of his. Demand it of him. When thy mission is ended return the way thou wentest. We will meet thee, for we shall already have been some days on the way. Depart at sunset.”

I had risen from my seat, and now saluting the king I left the room. I went to the guard-house and chose twenty men, bidding them be ready to depart at sunset, then went to my own house.

CHAPTER XXIV

EDBERT AND HIS MEN SET OUT FOR WORCESTER

AT SUNSET we set out. We went along the same road that years before we trod when I took Ostryth, my wife, and Elflaeda, my daughter, to Deira, and when we lost Wulfhere. My thoughts were much with them as we went. Sad had been my lot, deprived as I was of these who had been so much to me, for to add to my many sorrows, word had come from Northumburg that my wife and daughter were slain—slain at the hands of the Deirans. I had a wife in my home in Penda's town, and things were pleasant enough there, but things were not to me what they had been.

We came at last to the village of Evesham, and passing through we came to that same rock above the river where we had camped before. The young thane with me ordered the men to lay their weapons and provisions on the ground, for here we would

stay, he said, for the night. When I heard him give the order I said—

“Nay, we will rest here but a little while and then move on.”

Wistan—for that was the young man’s name—asked why we should leave this spot so well fitted for a camp.

“Because it is my will,” I growled.

I saw that he felt hurt at my crossness, so bidding him follow me we walked a little way up the rock together. We stood at last on the very cliff overlooking the river far beneath that I had stood on years before watching the strange battle of Wulphere and the bears.

“Look yonder, Wistan,” I said, pointing across the gorge. “Seest thou yon cave up in the rocks there?”

“I see it, lord,” he answered.

“Six years ago I passed here with my son,” I went on, “my son, Wulphere, my strong, brave, gallant son.” And my voice broke as I said the words, and tears rolled down my cheeks. “A bear was playing with two cubs on yonder shelf of rock before the cave. Unknown to me Wulphere swam over the stream and climbed the cliff. He fought the great bear in our sight and slew her for her cubs, then tried to make off with them in his arms. The male bear heard the noise and sprang upon him.

“Whether he killed my son or no I know not, but he seized him with his teeth and leaping up the rock made off with him. We tried to follow but we could not. No doubt the lad is dead.”

Wistan looked up at me in pity.

“I understand now, lord—come, let us leave this spot,” he said.

We marched on further for a mile or two, then camped in a little grove that we found. Little did I sleep that night, for thoughts of Wulphere, of Elfaeda and of Ostryth, my wife, came fast and thick upon me.

“Come, Edbert,” I said to myself at last, “these are all dead; why worry about them? Thy grieving can not bring them back, then leave off grieving. ’Tis foolishness to make thy life a funeral.”

I shook my sorrow off at last, and slept.

The next day we reached a village—Pershore by name—and inquired of the head man the way to Worcester. He pointed out the road.

“There is a shorter path,” he said, “but few men take it. To the right it lies, past yonder mountain.”

“Why do few take it?” I asked.

“Because the mountain is haunted,” he answered. “Up there dwells an army of great bears. They were all men at one time but by some wizard’s power they were changed to bears, though still they possess men’s souls.”

“A likely tale,” I said, and ordered my men to take the shorter path.

We came to many turnings in the road and had to ask our way of men we met. Always they counseled us to turn and take the longer road to Worcester, and always the reason they gave was the dread of the bears.

“Brave men have gone from time to time deep into yonder woods,” one said, “and they have seen the bear-host pass on their hunt. Two great men clad in bearskins lead the rout; the bears come tearing close behind. It is a fearsome sight.”

“Hast ever seen them, man?” I asked.

“Nay, not I,” he answered, “but I have many times heard the bear-men’s shout, and the growl and snarl of their great hounds.”

“Aye, in thy dreams,” I laughed, and we passed on.

And now we found the path to be less and less frequented. Any that we now met, and they were few, said that they ventured there in broad daylight, but no man dwells there. We pushed on till the path was hardly discernible. It was with great care that we had to pick our way lest we should miss it, and our travelling was slow.

All day we tramped, meeting now not a soul. The sun was setting in the west and it was almost time to camp again. We left the path and followed one now long disused that led to a hut that we could dimly see about a half-mile off. We reached it but found it empty. A few rough benches and a battered rotting table were all that occupied it. Some rotting bearskins too littered the floor. I noticed they were brown and white.

“Let us camp here,” I said.

My men made fires and cooked our meal, then gathered ferns and leaves to sleep upon. Some of them made their beds inside the hut, some of them out, then stretched themselves upon them and soon were snoring. As for Wistan and I, we sat and talked a while, and made our plans.

“Hearken, lord!” he said suddenly.

I listened. Far off I could hear the sound

of shouting accompanied by barking growls. The sounds were very faint at first, but as we listened they seemed to grow nearer, though still they were far off.

"The bear-men," whispered Wistan.

"Come, take thy sword, Wistan!" I said, "and we will go into the forest and see what we can make of this. I have a wish to ferret out this mystery."

I rose and he rose with me. We buckled on our swords, and leaving the hut and the men sleeping in and about it, we made our way in the direction of the sounds we heard. The moon was at the full and shone almost as bright as day, so we were able without trouble to push forward swiftly for almost a mile in the direction of the hills.

"See! Here is a path!" exclaimed Wistan.

We had come to a beaten track, a track such as deer make in the forest. There were many deer-marks in the soft clay, and here and there what looked like claws—bears' claws.

"Come, we will watch here," I said.

We found a rock overlooking the track and deeply shadowed by the trees. On the top of this rock we stretched ourselves and waited.



NEARER and nearer drew the sounds, and louder, ever louder they grew. That the shouts were the shouts of men there could be no doubt, though what were the words they uttered we could not tell. Bears too there were; we could tell them by the grunts and *wuffs*, with every now and then a snarling growl.

And now we could hear the thunder of many feet. Two deer leaped past us fleeing for their lives. Two minutes later two great forms dashed into the open. Like bears running on their hind legs they looked, but as they came up close we saw that they were men clad in the skins of bears. A moment we looked, then they were gone, and in their wake followed great shaggy forms all brown and white like the bear that carried off Wulphere.

Two minutes went by and still they thundered past. The sound was like the rumble of an earthquake, and the rock on which we lay shook with their tread; then they too were gone, and the noise of the hunt passed slowly up the valley till once more it became dim as we had first heard it.

I looked at Wistan; he was rubbing his eyes.

"Is this a dream-vision, lord?" he asked.

"I almost think it must be, Wistan," I answered, "for surely never man saw such a sight before; and yet we would scarce dream the same dream, you and I. I laughed at the men we met who told us of the Bear Brethren and their hounds, but it is even more marvelous than they said."

We got down from the rock and walked back to the hut. We found the soldiers all awake wondering what had happened us, and what were the strange sounds they had heard. We told them all that we had seen. Some said they liked not this journey, others that they would be glad when we were out of this haunted place.

"Fie on you," I said, "are you not Penda's men? Fear must be a thing unknown to Penda's children. Lie down again and sleep," I ordered, "the bears are gone and ye must have rest for we have far to travel still."

The men who slept outside the hut dragged their beds within, and we all slept there.

We woke early the next day and resumed our march. As we went I thought over the sight that I had seen. The bear that carried off Wulphere was brown and white, as were all these I had just seen. How came it that two men lived and hunted with these bears? If men could live with them was it not possible that Wulphere was one of the two men? I had heard tales of wild beasts living as brethren with men.

The face of one of these men I had seen quite clearly in the moonlight. He was the shorter of the two, very broad and thick-set, and had a red beard not long but bushy. The face of the other I had not seen so clearly, but his frame I saw, and he was very tall and well-proportioned, with great long arms and legs. Could it be possible this was Wulphere?

With such thoughts in my mind I went on with my men. We turned aside into a little grove a hundred paces from the path, to eat our noonday meal. There scattered on the grass before us were the whitened bones of many men. Some bony hands still grasped their spears. Rusty swords and axes lay about, and daggers. Broken shields and dented helms, with armor-plates and buckles, lay half-hidden in the grass, and grinning skulls looked up at us at every step. It was a gruesome sight.

"Who can these be?" asked Wistan.
"What has befallen them?"

"I know not; it is hard to say," I said.

One of the soldiers turned up a shield that had fallen face downward, and brought it to me. There plain as day were the arms of Mercia painted on it. It seemed then that these were Mercian soldiers, but how did they happen here?

"See! Here are other skeletons that are not the bones of men!" one cried.

I saw they were bears' bones and there were many of them about. And now I noticed that the bones of most of the men seemed to be crushed in places as if bitten by the bears, but some were chopped as with an ax. How could it be that these were Mercian soldiers, and when was it they fell here? Then suddenly I remembered that a company of Mercian guards, led by Coelred, had been sent six years ago to hunt for Wulfhere. No word had ever come to us in Wodensburg concerning their fate, for they had never returned. Ah, me! So this is how they died. Truly it was the work of the Bear Brethren and their following.

But why had they come here to seek Wulfhere? They must have had some rea-

son for coming hither. Clearly it seemed they expected to find him here. I picked up the head of a heavy ax whose handle had been severed. I had never seen an ax quite like it. A formidable weapon it must have been in the hands of him who had wielded it. It was two-bladed and straight-edged, and painted red. I examined it carefully on all sides, and my heart jumped into my mouth as I saw scratched deep into the horn furl close to the blade the words—

WULFHERE OWNS ME

Ha! So it was Wulfhere who had used that ax! Wulfhere it must have been then that raced with the bears. Yes, when I came to think of it, did not the other hunter carry just such an ax as this? I could have leaped for joy, for now I was on the track of my lost son. I must get forward speedily to Worcester, then we would return this way, and it would go hard if I did not find my son again.

I dropped the ax where I had picked it up and went back to my men. We could not dine there among all those bones, so we went farther down the path and had our meal, then resumed our journey.

TO BE CONTINUED.





The Shu King

by
ROBERT J. PEARSALL

Author of "Ming Gold," "Intrigue," etc.

A CHINESE crowd is a mystery with many tangents—one that I, John Partridge, who have named myself in moments of candor a "searcher after the unusual," never tire of watching.

Each passing yellow face has its separate challenge for the curiosity, unreadable, so that it has sometimes seemed to me that the real deity of the East is a Secret-Keeping God, with fingers upon lips. The inner mind of the Chinese is known to no white—that is my conviction. Yet sometimes the veil is stirred by the wind of a strong emotion and one gets a glimpse of what is behind it, as I did on one very dusty morning in Peking, where I was loitering for a purpose.

I had passed in a cloud of that soil-making dust blowing in from the Gobi Desert—black, stickier and more insistently penetrating than any other dust that ever was—from the foreign section in the Tatar City to smelly Ch'ien Men, where old China still holds fast. Here was a district I like to wander in, a district of amazing confusion, hubbub, dirt, endless industry, admirable cheerfulness, incessant chattering, and, I was convinced, of incredible adventure. Adventure that had so far, however, kept just around the corner of my imagination.

Walking down Pipe Street, I came to where the stretch of wooden-fronted shops

with fantastic signs blend into the mud-walled middle-class compounds, and slackened my steps in the vicinity of a street-juggler's stand. The street was fairly blocked with the inevitable crowd, watching him with curious intentness, and as indifferent to the dust storm as it was to the jostling of the passers-by—brown-legged and heavily laden coolies, dignified fat mandarins and merchants with fans on their wrists, beggars with starved, bare chests and women with mincing steps and brightly incarnadined cheeks.

Also there were bare-pated and long-coated Mongols—hawkers of venison, these; water-carriers and barbers from sturdy Shantung; cooks from epicurean Canton; wealthy traders from Shansi. I could pick out men from all over the sprawling empire; and I was regretting the recent government order, "*Mo 'an kuo shih*" (eschew all political discussion) and thinking that what this motley crowd knew might be worth many years of life for me in the solution of the problem that had brought and held me to China, when I saw one certain face distorted with the passion of fear.

It belonged—and this was the most curious part of the thing—to a very old man. He was shabbily robed in the solid black gown of the scholar class—that most honored class in China. He had a magnificent forehead and almost unnaturally bright

eyes, and his fine beardless skin was like wrinkled saffron parchment over the bony block of his face.

He tottered rather than walked up-town from the residence section; but his eagerness was so great that he came forward almost as fast as a run. His breath came in sobs; the black dogs of terror seemed to drive him; but the only clue to his panic was that his lean right hand seemed to hold something concealed under the breast of his gown.

I stopped just on the edge of the press around the juggler, and watched this strange thing—strange, for in China the aged at least have mostly learned to greet Death as a friend. I thought it hardly probable that it was any fear for his own life that was troubling him. And—this was rather curious, considering the outcome—there was a moment during which I identified him somehow with that ninety-year-old scholar Fuh-sang, who at the time of the Burning of the Books and the killing of the *literati* some twenty centuries ago feigned insanity and put out his own eyes in order that at least part of the still sacred Chinese Classics might be preserved through his memory.

The old man came on to the edge of the crowd, seemingly unnoticed by any one but me, for the Chinese habitually regard a stranger's troubles as his alone. I expected, since he was in so great a hurry, that he would turn aside to avoid the pack; but instead he crowded into the very center of it.

His intention was evidently to lose himself in it, and so to shake off pursuit; but I remember thinking what a fine place for an assassin to hide himself was that same crowd, provided—which was highly probable in that district of twisted alleys—that he could have cut in ahead of the old man and reached the spot before him.

For a minute I lost sight of him; but naturally he made a slight disturbance as he forced his way through the press, and so I followed him. Did I, when he was half-way through, hear a weak, pitiful cry from the vicinity of that disturbance?

I thought so, but I couldn't be sure, for just then there had sounded from a government enclosure on the other side of the Ch'ien Men gate one of those hoarse Chinese trumpets, the gurgling notes of which make one instinctively think of evil things. And he was still moving, so

I turned and kept pace with him along the fringe of the crowd; and when he came out of it I was loitering in front of a chow-stand only half the width of the street away from him.

Just then there was a particularly violent swirl of dust, obscuring the sun and everything else; and he was a little way up the street before I saw him clearly. In fact, he was as far up the street as he was destined ever to get. His knees had given way under him; and, struggling weakly, he crumpled forward and lay twitching on the very dirty cobbles.

Now, a death in a Chinese street ordinarily causes little more excitement than the passing of a fly in a swarm of other flies—which seeming callousness may be a survival in effect of a certain cruel old law. No longer ago than the passing of the Manchu dynasty was it true in many overcrowded cities that he who saved to life a mouth that must be fed was responsible for the filling of that mouth so long as it required food—truly a potent device for the reduction of a burdensome population. And so it was not at all remarkable that only one person besides myself seemed to notice the old man's fall.

Really, the remarkable thing was that there were two of us. The thing that required explanation was the motive of the other man.

I could not see where he had come from; possibly he had followed the old man out of the crowd. Anyway the slight lessening of the dust had revealed to me, besides the falling figure, a small, evil-faced man whom I took for a Cantonese, dressed in the ragged garments of a coolie, and leaping with extraordinary swiftness upon the stricken man.

He reached him before I had well started, and bent over the body with his back toward me. I couldn't see what he did, save that when he straightened again the old man was lying face up. The Cantonese whirled, unfortunately for him, and came in my direction.

I sprang—and had him.

An instant later I had his blouse.



I AM not proud of that particular episode. One expects small resistance from a Chinese coolie—muscles flaccid, the nerves slack from centuries of underfeeding. But this man came at

me like a tiger, cursing untranslatably. A dull-colored knife, hard to follow in the whirling dust, flourished in his hand.

It was disconcerting; and to save myself from the touch of the knife, which might well be poisoned, I flung him back. But I held fast to the skirt of his blouse, and it slipped off his brown body, covered thief's fashion with oil, and he was free.

Besides his blouse, I had some flat object that was hard and smooth to the touch, and that fitted almost exactly the side pocket of my coat, into which I slipped it hurriedly.

I did not look at it. My eyes were needed for my assailant, who was coming back at me. Besides, the street fakir's crowd was breaking up, spilling over toward us with a babel of unfriendly sound.

It was neither the time nor the place to search into the causes of things, so I flung his blouse at the Chinaman's head, and followed it with my fist. The blow was only a glancing one; but it shook him up and sufficiently discouraged him.

He retreated a little and for an instant glared at me with a look of consternation. Then he turned and ran away at top speed, head down, in the purposeful way of one who bears a tale.

I should have liked to follow him; but Ch'ien Men is safer for thieves than for the pursuers of thieves. Besides, I felt there remained with me the key to the incident; and if the old man could only talk. . . .

Instantly I had shoved through the rather hostile but stolid swarm that had gathered and was bending over him.

"Old Scholar—" I began in Mandarin, using the title that from its honorary character would be aptest to stir his memory.

His oblique eyelids fluttered open. There was certainly no recognition in the look he gave me; and yet there was an appeal and a heart-broken quality in it that made me think again of that ancient martyr Fuh-sang, who had mutilated himself that learning might live.

And, a queer enough coincidence, both his voice and his words increased that impression—the former beautifully clear in enunciation as is only the voice of the *literati*, the latter a jumble of phrases and sentences that rushed out pell-mell in a race with death.

"It is the corruption of the old wisdom.

It is the pollution of the spring... Say to my brothers that even Wu Ting, miserable earthworm of knowledge that he is, knows that the books are false. The tale of them is a lie; the Shu King is not completed. This which I have taken is the revealer of false light—"

He was fumbling at the breast of his gown. I wanted to question him, wanted to put whatever it was that I had taken from his probable murderer back into his hand.

But I had time for neither the one nor the other, for of a sudden he shivered slightly, fell back with dropping jaw and died.

That was all, yet when I came to my feet again I felt I was tiptoeing upon the edge of a very dangerous gulf, with a lurking flame of the unexplained burning beyond it. For the Shu King was the *literati's* name for the Chinese Classics; what the ancient scholar had martyred himself partially to preserve, the modern scholar had died to save from corruption.

From corruption at whose hands, and for what purpose? My present business in Asia suggested the answer to those questions. Also it suggested other questions, to which other answers were required; and it demanded that I find those answers.

My first act was one of mere decency; I went into a tobacconist's and paid the proprietor to take the body into his shop and to notify the authorities. Then I hurried up the street till I met an idle rickshaw, hailed it and made my way with all speed to the foreign Hôtel des Wagon-Lits, the only place in Peking where even the long arm of a Chinese criminal society would find it hard to reach.

Not until I was safe in my upper room—Sybaritic luxury after the Shensian inns—did I venture a glance at the probable cause of the whole affair.

Then I was astounded. It was quite five minutes before I reconciled the nature of the object with my suspicions—which, I may as well now say, was that I had stumbled upon a new scheme of that Koshinga whom so many regarded with a certain reasonableness as being a major devil housed in death. Of that Koshinga, with whose maleficent purposes as head of the revolutionary *tong* called the Ko Lao Hui, my present visit to Peking had largely to do.

But to come back to my find. It was

merely a square plate of perfectly transparent crystal, about six inches on an edge.

Its only peculiar feature was that its thickness was not uniform, varying from half an inch to an inch, both surfaces being covered with many nodules and depressions, perplexingly irregular in outline. I could not think of any way this object would fit into my half-conceived theory until I placed it over a copy of the *Peking Gazette* and saw how the various curvatures of the crystal distorted the printed characters into utterly unrecognizable shapes.

Then I reflected that a thing which will obscure may under reverse circumstances be used to clarify. And if Koshinga, to suit his purposes, had resolved to spring upon China a fraudulent purported copy of the missing sections of the Shu King, it would hardly be in any easily read form.

For one thing, he would have to account for the fact that it had escaped the destruction which had erased the rest of the sections—reconstructed later mainly from Fuh-sang's memory.



IT SHOULD hardly be necessary to go back here to tell how Hazard and I—you must have heard of Hazard—had for a long time served the Chinese Republic as best we could against its incessantly plotting enemies that would have overthrown it from within. The essential thing to know is that Hazard was at present in Tientsin, held there by another affair; and that I had come alone to Peking for consultation with our chief, who may be best described as head of the Chinese secret service.

Also I wanted to receive at first hand the report of a great conference, composed of all the high officials of the Republic, which was to meet on the day following this Ch'ien Men episode, to discuss methods of combating the Ko Lao Hui evil.

By my baggage, clothing, hotel registry, and I hope by my general appearance I was a verdant tourist fresh from the States. Really I was pretty well steeped in China, ancient and modern; and also in the infernally clever methods of that *tu fei*, mixture of the base and vicious, whose hand I had learned to look for behind every particularly subtle bit of deviltry that I discovered—and whose hand I felt was behind this affair of the crystal.

I might, of course, have gone straight to

my chief in the government house with the crystal and the story and my suspicions—but I reflected that as yet they were only suspicions. Also I knew that the mentality that animated the Ko Lao Hui rarely ran on a single track.

If the old scholar's dying words possessed the meaning I read into them, here was a cunning device for undermining the Chinese government with the people—but Koshinga was accustomed to back cunning with force. Very probably there was more to his plot than I had as yet even imagined.

Well, I would continue to play the part of a verdant and unsuspecting tourist.

I had no illusions that I would not be traced to the hotel, nor that an attempt would not be made to recover the crystal, nor that the enemy would have any more merciful scruples in my case than they had shown in the case of the old man.

And though it is sound doctrine that one who ventures nothing will probably gain in like proportion, it is also true that a decent regard for one's life promotes discretion. My next step was based on the premise that there is no safeguard equal to that of making one's continued existence essential to the plans of one's antagonists.

I stepped to the phone and requested the hotel office to send me a reliable runner. By the time he came I had my mysterious possession well wrapped; and I directed him to take it to a skilful worker in glass of whom I happened to know and to pay double price for an exact duplicate, to be made instantly.

These were my instructions. Whether it would be possible for the man to imitate the crystal precisely I didn't know; but his commercial instincts would at least insure the attempt. And if his work was only superficially accurate it would serve the purpose I had in mind.

Within a few hours the boy returned with the two plates. I had made a slight nick on the edge of the original; and this I wrapped again and sent to my chief.

I enclosed an unsigned note, telling him he would probably have use for the article in the near future. He was not a man to throw it away after that.

Then I had a talk with the proprietor of the hotel, divulging my identity and making certain arrangements for an eventuality which I hoped to force.

Returning to my room, I passed several hours there rather impatiently. I had recalled another thing that lent added force to my surmise. I had remembered that for the last month Hazard and I had been receiving reports of a mysterious influx to Peking from every corner of China—an influx of the *literati*, the class to which the old man had belonged, a class which in solidity resembles a clan, and whose opinions have for two thousand years made and unmade governments.

Coupled with what I believed, this influx took on a terrible meaning. I grew very much worried lest the Ko Lao Hui should give up its attempt to recover the thing chance had placed in my hands; and it was with distinct relief that I heard the phone ring and the clerk's voice saying that a Chinese gentleman named Ho Chung Fang wished to see me in my room.



"BUT how," I questioned, "do I know that the thing which you describe belongs to you?"

My caller looked at me curiously. The clerk had described him incorrectly; he was a large, bulky man, plainly of mixed blood—that nondescript and essentially evil type which combines the worst qualities of the Caucasian and Mongolian races, and which for that reason was apt to rise so rapidly in the councils of the Ko Lao Hui.

A certain latent ferocity seemed to lurk within him, and his features were cunning and brutal; but his eyes were unlighted by any particular intelligence. He spoke perfect English and had just offered me a sum in Chinese taels larger than I care to state, if I would surrender to him then and there that which I had taken from the Cantonese assassin.

My failure to do so evidently puzzled him. Doubtless he unjustly impugned the average tourist in his confident non-expectancy of any further trouble with me once he had mentioned that sum. It had probably been that confidence that in large measure had led him to dare this visit to me—that, and the fact that if I had accused him of complicity in the murder I had witnessed he could likely produce a dozen witnesses to swear to any saving lies he cared to invent. But now he was plainly uneasy at my obstinacy—an uneasiness that I meant presently to relieve.

"I have described it fully," he answered, lifting his hands deprecatingly.

And as I still looked doubtful:

"I may as well tell you. The crystal is a key to a lock. It is useful to those that possess that lock, and to no others. Surely it will be the part of virtue to restore it, especially when the act will profit you so greatly."

"The old man, then, who you say stole it and whom I saw die, possessed a similar lock?" I inquired innocently.

"The old man was *fungla*—crazy," retorted Ho Chung Fang. "Much learning had gone to his head. He wished to destroy a great usefulness, and with no profit to himself."

That was closer to the truth as I imagined it than I had expected my visitor to come and I thought the point fair enough from which to begin the yielding which I had all along intended.

"I take it from your words that you possess this lock."

"Your honorable judgment is correct."

"Then—it is a great sum you offer me." I hesitated.

He took this as a sign of surrender and started to reach for the money in an inner pocket; but I held up my hand.

"And there is this way to settle the matter. Show me the lock and you may have the key for the price that you have fixed. Take me to wherever your proof is—isn't that simple?" and I smiled with a show of concealed satisfaction at the cleverness of the idea.

Ho Chung Fang was only half-Oriental, and he couldn't quite conceal the delight he felt at my unexpected offer. If I had been the callow tourist that I tried to appear I should probably not have noticed that delight. As it was, I realized that I had solved for him most handily not only the problem of how he was to acquire the mysterious crystal but also the problem of my own easy disposition among the long list of men who tell no tales.

For my experience with the Ko Lao Hui left me with no false idea that my surrender of the crystal would end matters, nor concerning the length of time that it had been planned that I should live.

He agreed readily; and presently we were bowling in two hooded Peking carts down Legation Street—the Chinese call it the Street of the Subject Nations—toward

cluttered and helter-skelter Ch'ien Men.

During that ride I saw plenty to keep me reminded of days when this street was not so peaceful as now. There was the great Tatar Wall with shell-torn sides and ramparts; there were the various legations huddled under it, still moated and fortified in memory of the 1900 affair.

There on the wall of the British Legation, chiseled deeply in letters many feet high, was the grim memorial to the whites who had died there in that year of tribulation—"Lest We Forget." Under the wheels of my cart were probably some of the many runways and tunnels dug by the Boxers in their attempt to break through the foreign defense—by those Boxers who had been at their strongest but a sprout from the parent Ko Lao Hui tree.

Grave enough in all conscience had been that affair; but if this Ko Lao Hui trouble finally burst, history would write the Boxer Revolt as insignificant in comparison, as a bellow's blast is insignificant beside a Yellow Sea typhoon.

I knew, for I had traveled and seen much, that the major part of China was merely waiting in mingled dread and expectancy for the day Koshinga would launch his avalanche, waiting with an ear wide to every rumor, with an eye on every shadow. When that avalanche came it would blot out all foreign life in China in a horrible manner—thus ran the whisperings.

From these whisperings Peking was as yet quite free. It being the seat of authority, the Ko Lao Hui had tried to lull the city into a sense of false security, for the ease of revolutionary propaganda elsewhere.

But there is an old saying that is deeply engraved on the Chinese mind—

"At words which come from the Northern Capital let all men tremble and obey."

So strong is this feeling that he who holds Peking in his hand is very apt to have the empire at his feet. It was impossible to conceive of Koshinga not trying to gain control there; and to a few of us it seemed certain that when he did so his long-planned harvest of wrath would begin.

I wondered if that day had come. Also I thought rather idly of the great conference of Koshinga's enemies that was to be held on the morrow; and I wondered if the military maxim was true that wherever one's

opponents are gathered *en masse* one's opportunities are greatest. If so, Koshinga's opportunity was at hand.

But we had passed through the Ch'ien Men gate, under the shadow of the old Manchu palaces with vermilion-red pillars and archways, their magnificence forever tarnished with age and the Gobi dust. Nearby stood the newer Government Building. Ahead of us appeared a long line of camels plodding slowly in from the western desert, laden with all manner of merchandise.

We passed the spot which had seen the murderous beginning of this whole affair; and we had gone but a little farther when Ho Chung Fang halted his cart and paid off both his driver and mine.

Then for about fifteen minutes he led me through a maze of twisted streets and blind alleys with unexpected passages opening off. During that walk I chattered rather volubly, pretending to be delighted with the mystery of the affair and to feel no threat of danger—which is often the way with that inexperience I was counterfeiting.

At the end of the walk I was confused as to direction; and when Ho Chung Fang indicated the place we were to enter I swiftly observed our position with regard to the towering Ch'ien Men pagoda, the Government House, and one of the ruined pagodas on the outer wall, so that I should be able to find it again.

From the street it was merely a mud-and-brick-walled compound as like some hundreds of others in Peking as could be imagined. The outer gate was locked, but opened readily enough before Ho Chung Fang's key; and we passed through three neglected courtyards with grass growing up between the bricks.

But the walk itself was worn deeply and its surface was freshly scoured as if many feet had passed over it recently. Except for that one sign, however, the grounds bore every evidence of desertion, as did also the low, dilapidated building at the rear, which had evidently once been used as a dwelling-place.

But it didn't surprise me any when Ho Chung Fang stepped behind a dust-covered old Buddhist shrine and seemed to press an invisible button on the stone—which action I merely conjectured, for his broad back was toward me and his hand hidden.

At any rate a section of the wall which had seemed unbroken opened inward—a wooden door covered with a light layer of stone. As soon as it had started to open, Ho Chung Fang stepped back and bowed me ahead of him.

 THREE feet beyond this wall was a second one; but between them was a set of stairs leading downward. As I put my foot on the topmost stair the light was shut off by the closing of the door, which from this side appeared to be quite an ordinary one with a Chinese knob and latch.

I descended the stairs with the feeling that Death walked behind me. And yet my reason told me that I was really safeguarded up to a certain point by my continued possession of the very thing that had caused it to be planned that I should be killed.

If he could help it, Ho Chung Fang wouldn't risk the breaking of the crystal by a struggle or a fall; he wouldn't strike until he had his hand on it.

There were fifteen steps to the stairs. When I came to the bottom of them I felt before me another wall, of wood.

Also I came as it were within the outer area of a barely perceptible sound—a sound which for all its faintness seemed queerly suggestive and familiar. Undoubtedly it came from beyond that wall; and yet when Ho Chung Fang reached over my shoulder and did something that caused another door to open, the sound was scarcely louder and still seemed a great distance away. It was a confused, intermittent and irregular noise, which sounded very much like the activity of a large number of men.

There was food for speculation in that. What work could men be engaged in under the surface of the earth?

It was only natural that my recent memory of the Boxer diggings should recur to me at that point; but it was also quite natural that I shouldn't dwell upon it long. For the opening of the second secret door—which on its inner, non-secret side also seemed quite the same as other doors—had revealed quite a large room, lit by candles bracketed about on the stone walls.

And standing about in that room were perhaps a dozen Chinese with low-caste faces but mandarin robes on their backs,

smiling, each and every one of them, the thin half-smile with which their race veils intense nervous expectancy.

I suppose they were surprized at sight of me, who entered assuming as best I could a look of ingenuous and unsuspecting pleasure at the strange things I was being permitted to see. Anyway none of them spoke until Ho Chung Fang after closing the door behind him assured them mistakenly:

"You may talk without fear. This man is a fool, who understands nothing but his own barbarian language."

At that I think about half the men in the room asked, guttural-voiced, the same question simultaneously—

"But the glass of the ancient reading?"

"The *ta-maotzu* (long-haired devil) has it."

At that information every man of them must have passed upon me the death sentence, yet their yellow faces didn't change. Nor was there any further questioning; there was a mute assumption that Ho Chung Fang had his reasons for bringing me here, and a proper plan for my disposition.

They shuffled their slippered feet and relaxed a little; some of them settled down on stools from which the opening of the doors had evidently caused them to rise. While Ho Chung Fang glided around in front of me I stared curiously about the room, seeing what I could.

Nothing I observed was really unexpected. There was a pile of metal plates six feet high, each plate about four feet square, in the farther corner of the room to my left. In the wall opposite me there was another heavy wooden door which the constructors of the place had not cared to conceal.

The peculiar noise I had heard, and which still continued, required this third door to explain it; and as for the metal plates, though my imagining of the details of the crystal's usefulness was only vague, yet the plates fitted in well with the general theory I had formed. Which is to say that they explained pretty well the murdered man's words concerning the falsity of the "books" and the non-completion of the Shu King, since any books which even pretended to complete the ancient Shu King must necessarily be inscribed on some substance which is pretty nearly imperishable.

And the four dread characters, "*Pao Ch'ien, Mien Yang*," which were emblazoned in red on yellow silk just above the inner door, added whatever corroboration was necessary to my conclusions concerning the nature of this rendezvous. They were the motto of the Boxers, which still remained the motto of the more dangerous Ko Lao Hui, "Destroy the foreigner, exalt the Chinese."

But Ho Chung Fang had thrust out his hand with a peremptory gesture.

"I will take it now," he said.

Whereupon I grinned as sillily as I could.

"But the proof!" I said as if the demand had turned into a stubborn jest on my part. "It is still lacking. You spoke of a lock to which this crystal is a key. I have not yet seen it."

Ho Chung Fang's eyes glittered with the first show of anger I had seen from him. There is no doubt what would have happened to me if his hand had not still been held by the knowledge that it would be almost impossible to take the crystal from me by force without breaking it. His glance drifted to a great pile of plates in the far corner of the room; and his features lightened slightly as if he had a thought that pleased him.

"It is well to be prudent concerning property, but one's life is more valuable," he said with a covert threat. "You have seen that one man has already died because of this crystal. However, because the proof that you ask is easy it will be given you. You will come this way."

He stepped across the room and I followed him, passing through the group of men, whose threatening fixity of regard made my mask of unsuspicion seem rather idiotic. Nevertheless I must retain it, it being the essence of the plan I had in mind.

And for that matter, I reflected, the more idiotic I appeared the better for the success of my last play. Which was to add to my character-part of inquisitive tourist that of a more than usually mad souvenir hunter.

But Ho Chung Fang had stopped before the pile of metal plates and was speaking again.

"The lock is here, but it is a lock in the door of knowledge which ignorance can not pass, however well supplied with keys. The old Chinese characters—can you read them?"

Considering my rôle, the assumption that I might be able to read them was a joke; and I replied with a laugh in the negative.

"Nor, I suppose, can you recognize them?"

I contrived a hesitatingly affirmative answer to that. If I could get it, I wanted a close look at those plates. Things were working out very well for me—only I wished I knew the meaning of those mysterious sounds which vibrated through the inner door, just to my right front.

Also I realized that a great many things could be done to me in the rage of an instant by those men who were closing in behind me. The completion of my plan to escape with the information I had secured would require that I arouse that rage; but I hoped to act so that bewildered surprise would nullify it, as far as action was concerned.

Ho Chung Fang, however, was now inviting me with a gesture to help him lower to the floor the topmost of the metal plates. I put my hands to one side of it, and together we lifted it and let it down easily.



WHEN we had done so I remained for a moment stooping over it. Either it was dull, worn and tarnished with age, or those appearances of age had been most successfully counterfeited.

And its surface was covered, as I had imagined it would be, with indecipherable and utterly confused and misshapen hieroglyphics—with crazy figurings that bore no resemblance to the Chinese written language of any period.

Indeed the lines were so twisted and jumbled that I found it hard to believe that they were even distortions of characters. I did not believe it until I remembered the distorted characters of the *Peking Gazette* as they had appeared through the crystal, the glass imitation of which was inside my coat.

Then I knew that instead of being the haphazard work of a madman that it appeared, this was as minutely particular a piece of engraving as was ever accomplished, even by infinitely painstaking Chinese.

For here, so written that none but the possessor of that crystal could interpret them, were presumably the purported missing sections of the Shu King, or Chinese

Classics, most sacred of all books to four hundred million people—fraudulent sections, I was sure, most carefully prepared for a purpose I thought I could divine.

By now I had straightened up. I was still facing the inner wall of the place. Ho Chung Fang stood squarely in front of me, with the metal plate between us.

If any one of the men behind me breathed, I couldn't catch the sound. Ho Chung Fang himself was watching me with feline attentiveness.

"You have said that you would know the ancient Chinese characters," he reminded me tonelessly. "If that is true and if you will look through the crystal at this tablet you will see how the key fits the lock. You will see how the characters appear."

Should I do this? I thought Ho Chung Fang shot a suggestive glance over my shoulder at the men to my rear. Bending over the tablet with the coveted crystal—or rather its replica—in my hand, I should be more at the mercy of my enemies than I cared to be, considering the menace of that glance which I had only half caught.

Perhaps, after all, Ho Chung Fang did not intend to wait until I handed him the crystal willingly. Perhaps the sight of it, localizing it, so that it could be seized with surety against breakage, would be the signal for the attack. Perhaps the opportunity he was giving me to examine the metal tablet was really a ruse to place me at a fatal disadvantage.

Well, I would not examine it then, though I wanted to very much. Particularly I wanted to know whether this replica of the crystal that I possessed was accurate enough to do the work of the original.

It had been a mistake, as I realized now, to insist upon an exact duplication of the crystal; for if I was sure that the object I had inside my coat was entirely worthless I could spare it destruction and consequently could spare myself at least a moment of very dire peril. But as matters stood. . . .

As they stood this was the moment when it was most necessary for me to appear like a man with an empty brain-pan, and I don't think any of these thoughts found their way to my features. Instead I grinned fatuously, made some inane remark about the interesting character of the experiment and drew the imitation

crystal from my inside breast pocket with a hand that trembled a little.

Ho Chung Fang's eyes gleamed upon it hungrily; and a convulsive movement seemed to pass through the group of men behind me. Now was the moment of crucial action. I took a short step forward and collided my foot hard against the edge of the metal plate.

I had already started to stoop, so it was only natural that I should be momentarily overbalanced. I think it appeared only natural, too, that in gripping at vacancy for support, I should let that smooth-surfaced thing which my enemies coveted so murderously slip through my fingers and fall.

I had figured out the whole thing carefully; and I still believe that if Ho Chung Fang had not at that instant started to execute a certain plan of his own mine would have succeeded.

Which was, of course, to break the imitation crystal; and then to confess to Ho Chung Fang and the Chinese that it had been an imitation, and to bargain with them for a safe return to the Wagon-Lits to procure the original for them. In support of which statements I had the receipted bill of the glassworker, which was descriptive of the imitation he had made, and also a receipt for a package I had deposited in the Wagon-Lits safe—which package really contained a paperweight, but would be delivered according to the terms of the receipt to "owner in person only."

Surely Ho Chung Fang's urgent desire to possess the crystal would persuade him to let me go back to the hotel under guard. Then would come into profitable play the arrangement I had made with the Wagon-Lits management instantly to arrest any Chinese who accompanied me back to the hotel.

There were certain risks connected with this plan, which would enable me to get quickly to my chief and to tell him what I had discovered. But I would continue to play the fool, and fools are ordinarily protected from violent deaths.

For instance, before the glass plate hit the metal I would begin to laugh inexplicably as at a crowning joke. It is hard to shoot a man who laughs.

Then I would explain that the joke was on myself, because I should now be compelled to surrender the original crystal,

which I had intended to keep as a souvenir, having had the imitation made in anticipation of the demand that would be made upon me for the much wanted crystal. That would be mad enough in all conscience—mad enough to convince even the suspicious Chinese of my harmlessness.



BUT I have been describing only what might have happened. This is what did happen.

Ho Chung Fang seized the moment I had selected to drop and break the imitation crystal as his moment to lay hold on it.

He leaped for me just as the thing left my hand. One of his hands went for the crystal, the other for my throat. But when he saw the crystal falling he forgot about me. He grasped at it with both hands frantically and caught it in mid-air.

Simultaneously there came the snarl of many voices and the sound of a rush from behind. Now I knew the meaning of Ho Chung Fang's glance across my shoulder.

But I had already sprung forward, my muscles reacting subconsciously to the warning of Ho Chung Fang's action. It was well that I had done so, for I felt the wind of a great blow fan the back of my head.

Masks were off; pretenses were ended; now nothing could save me but heels and head. And for the moment heels took precedence.

I darted straight forward, ducking low and overturning Ho Chung Fang in my flight. A revolver spat behind me.

I swerved sharply to my right; and, there being no other possible way to flee, I laid hold on the latch of the inner door and with a swift contraction of every muscle in my body I yanked that door open.

I plunged through it just as another bullet flicked skin from my cheek. Whirling, I slammed the door shut and found a bolt and shoved it home.

Then I turned as the door creaked under the weight of human flesh that was flung against it. The darkness was absolute; but I seemed to be at the beginning of a tunnel about four feet wide, with earth walls and floor. I began to walk rapidly down that tunnel, pondering, as I went, three things concerning it.

First, it was apparently fairly well ven-

tilated, probably by air-shafts running up into secret cellars, a detail which would be easily managed by an organization as strong as the Ko Lao Hui. But on the other hand there was at this point absolutely no smell of freshly turned earth, but rather a musty, disagreeable odor which bespoke the old Boxers' diggings.

And from ahead of me, still rather indistinct but no longer puzzling, came that which must be the sound of many men hard at work, prolonging this tunnel.

Prolonging it, to what purpose and toward what end? I think I got a glimmering of the truth; but just then I was like a trapped rat, and nothing seemed important save that I escape.

Nothing else, in fact, was important; for if I could not escape what good would my knowledge be? So I kept on down the rather crooked tunnel, caroming from time to time into the curving walls of it, with the loud battering, which had by then begun at the door behind me, sounding in my ears like the hammering of fate.

The intervals between the heavy blows—which were probably dealt with several of the metal plates held together, and against which I did not believe the door would long hold—were filled with an odd mixture of falsetto Chinese voices, jabbering in a very frenzy of anger.

It did not seem to me that my escape, which was as yet really no escape at all, could by itself have provoked such wrath. Probably, I thought, they had already discovered the fraud I had imposed upon them, and that the imitation crystal I had left behind me was worthless.

Well, they would be after me soon. I could see no chance of escape, but I had started to run, when I suddenly found myself sprawl on the ground, holding with all my strength the right wrist of a man who lay half under me, and who was trying to stab me.

I shall never know exactly how that happened. Perhaps he had heard me coming and lain in wait for me; perhaps he had been hurrying to investigate the noise at the door, and the encounter was as much a surprise to him as to me.

Anyway the moment he touched my clothing he knew me of course for an enemy, and that it was a life-and-death struggle there in the dark.

As for me, he was a Ko Lao Hui, who

gave no quarter and asked for none. The battering at the door still continued while I struggled with an incredibly muscular figure, large for a Chinese, that writhed and twisted and strove to tear his knife-hand loose from my grip.

The door still held then, but it could not hold much longer; and it came to my mind that even if I broke away from my present antagonist I would be driven head-on against others. There was really no escape from this predicament of mine but death.

And hard upon that hopeless thought came hope. One may sometimes die by proxy.

A moment later I got my assailant under me and discovered that we had squirmed about until the back of his head was directly above a large rock which was imbedded in the floor of the tunnel. It took a desperate rally of all my strength, for the fellow was very powerful; but I managed to press his knife-hand down upon his chest, and with my other hand at his throat where it had been from the beginning to prevent outcry—somehow to lift him and fling him back again, crushing down upon him with my whole weight.

He seemed to collapse. A swift examination showed that he was dead.

Instantly I was tearing at his loose coolie's blouse. When I had him stripped I emptied my pockets of papers, wrapped them in the dead man's clothing and flung the bundle farther back into the tunnel.

Then I yanked off my own outer clothing, suit, shirt, shoes and hat and dressed the dead man in them completely. Save for the shoes, which were too large, they fitted him not badly; for they were newly purchased, and I was worn lean from hardships in the West. I kept my gun, which the Ko Lao Hui would hardly miss from my outfit since so far I had had no chance to use it.

The thing was done, but none too soon. I had barely reached the bundle of clothing which I had tossed away from the body when the door which had held my enemies back swung open. I heard the bolt fastenings give way; and the angry Chinese, now settled into a purposeful silence, came through the door in a rush.

Some light must also have come through that door, but the curves in the tunnel cut it off; and when the Chinese reached the body and stumbled over it, with me

crouching a little farther back in the tunnel, all of us were in utter darkness.



"IT IS indeed the pale foreigner, though one may only know it by his barbarian clothing. Face and head are blood-covered, but there is no need to examine them.

"Doubtless your honorable bullet killed him Li Huang. It was a shot full of zeal, but it would have been better had it not been fired, and the *kwei-tzu* (foreign devil) had been saved for the torture."

It was Ho Chung Fang's voice, speaking over the body which he thought was mine, and which I had heard him kick violently immediately after examining it. Its tones denoted vicious anger, which was easily understood; but the cause for the fear that was in it was not so obvious.

Still, it might be divined. Koshinga was not an easy master, and certainly Ho Chung Fang had twice bungled in this matter of the crystal.

"It is true," said some one else in the group that stood around him. "His death is an ill thing for us, though it must be that he was no stranger recently ocean-borne, but one of the two great enemies to our cause of whom we have been warned.

"How else could he have known the importance of the reading-crystal, so that he brought here instead a useless glass? Doubtless he has the reading-crystal hidden, but now we shall never find it, and Koshinga must be told."

"Aye!" muttered several voices uneasily and yet with a certain urgency. "Koshinga must be told!"

"His anger will be the hotter the longer the telling is delayed," one man continued.

"Moreover," said another voice, "on the morrow he will demand it of us in any case, for then he takes all things into his hands—even the Throne of the Middle Kingdom, which will be the Central Throne of the world. So, Ho Chung Fang, you who had the responsibility of the crystal and the revealing of the exalted new books of the Shu King to the scholars, you from under whose eyes Wu Ting, the old scholar, stole the crystal, you should tell Koshinga now."

These few sentences told me much. Concerning the *literati* and the first theft of the crystal, there was nothing that I

hadn't already surmised; but that Koshinga was somewhere present—here was news!

For if Koshinga had been easily come by, if he had been accustomed to mix personally in his own intrigues, he would not have lived as long as he had. Rather he, China's evil genius, had hidden behind his yellow cloud of followers and directed them like a storm god from afar. Now he was present; and the reason for it was that tomorrow Peking was to witness the culmination of his long scheming for power.

Tomorrow! Tomorrow would also witness another thing, the great conference in the Government House of China's officialdom, of Koshinga's enemies.

And was not the tunnel, so far as I could judge its direction, being prolonged straight toward that Government House?

Truly Koshinga was finding his opportunity in the massing of his opponents; truly here was a plot worthy of his ambition and of his infernal artistry. That is, if I reasoned correctly.

But to balk that plot! An idea came to me, swiftly growing out of the substance of what I had overheard. By Ho Chung Fang's fault had the crystal been lost; and these men had taken upon themselves the guilt of secrecy as long as they dared.

It was clear that they would force him to confess—and probable that he would go to Koshinga alone. If he did, here was still a chance—a chance!

Perhaps Ho Chung Fang realized that it was inevitable, for after a moments' silence he grunted:

"It is well. It will be done."

"May the wrath of Koshinga touch you but lightly," said some one as, leaving the dead body where it lay, they parted from Ho Chung Fang and turned back the way they had come.

There was a slight depression in the wall of the tunnel near where I was standing, and I shrank back in it, with the bundle of clothing pressed between my knees. It was so dark that I knew when Ho Chung Fang passed me only by the sound of his footsteps. That, and the unpleasant sound of his breathing; which was heavy and significant of fear.

Well, that fear was probably justified. Koshinga's rules were absolute; his penalties for failure were not light. But Ho

Chung Fang might not live to reach Koshinga.

After he had gone a little way I followed him, with the rocky tunnel-bottom cutting my bare feet. Upon me was a great regret that I should not be able to follow him to his journey's end, into the presence of Koshinga, that gray specter of doom to all that was good in New China. But the odds were too great for chancing; Koshinga knew well how to guard himself; and I must escape, if I could, with my half-triumph, my knowledge of Koshinga's plans.

I had left the clothing of the dead Chinaman behind me, hoping to return later and to recover my papers. I needed clothing, but not his.

Particularly I needed, and I must secure, the clothing of Ho Chung Fang, who was going to the judgment of Koshinga.

I followed him, putting my naked feet down like a cat's. Presently I moved a little faster, closing in upon him. This fight must also be at hand-grips, a silent fight.

How far I was from Koshinga's audience-chamber I did not know, nor how close to other enemies. Certainly my gun was doing me little good this day.

When I came close enough to Ho Chung Fang I leaped.

Fifteen minutes later, to the ears of the inwardly trembling Chinese waiting for Ho Chung Fang's return to the anteroom, there came the sound of shuffling feet and a low whimpering approaching from within the tunnel. They had of course no doubt as to the meaning of those sounds nor as to the identity of the man who made them. Koshinga's punishments were varied, and usually mysterious in method and terrible in result.

Hands fumbled uncertainly at the other side of the half-opened door. They pulled it weakly open. I came through it. What the Chinese saw was this:

A figure with shoulders collapsed, head down, muscles twitching as if in agony, huddled in a mandarin robe—Ho Chung Fang's robe—which was disordered and dirty. The right forearm of this pitiful figure was pressed over its eyes so that the loose sleeve, hanging down, shielded its face. And the explanation of this might be gathered from my moaning:

"The hand of Koshinga has touched me. Death enters through my eyes. The hand

of Koshinga— Let no man touch me. I am accursed?"

That exit of mine was a little melodramatic, but it was effective. The Chinese shrank back from me—so much I could see through some slits I had cut in the sleeve of the robe.

Curiosity doubtless burned within them—that callous Eastern curiosity that ever peeps in at the heart of suffering—yet was their fear stronger. Fear lest they should even appear to desire to succor one whom Koshinga had smitten.

And so, guarded by that fear, I passed between the two receding rows of them to the outer door of the room. Fumbling for the latch, I opened that door and passed out.

Life was ahead of me—life, and the doing of what I conceived to be a greater good than is ever the chance of most men. But there is nothing so dangerous as the appearance of fear, and I did not hurry up those stairs.

The dim candlelight flickered from below; and the latch of the door to freedom, which from this side hid no secrets from the eye, was plain to my view.

I opened it and passed out slowly, still moaning; nor was I to outward appearance other than a Chinaman miserably afflicted, until I was safe in a curtained Peking cart and on my way to my chief in the Government House. I had something to tell him which would cause a stir within the walls of that house.

 TWO days later I again visited this man, who because of the fact that he still holds office had best remain unnamed and undescribed.

"Your servant's duty to New China, who owes you her life," he said, "commands that I prostrate myself before you. The raid which your honorable information made possible was a nearly complete success. Two hundred were taken in the underground workings, and confession was had from many of them.

"The plan was as your exalted intelligence divined—to enter the Government House

secretly from below, to make prisoners of the officials when they were gathered for the great conference and to take possession of the machinery of the government in the name of the revolution. Doubtless the riotous devils would have then risen in all parts of the empire and the revolt——"

"But," I interrupted him, "the principal thing, the important thing, Koshinga himself——"

"Also," pursued my chief imperturbably, politely evading the question whose disappointing answer I felt I already knew, "there were discovered the plates which purported to contain the missing sections of the Shu King, vulgarly called the Chinese Classics. And among other falsities these sections, when interpreted by the crystal which you sent me——"

"They extolled Koshinga and the Ko Lao Hui, of course," I put in. "Prophesied their coming to power, and even justified this particular means to power—the wholesale capture and execution of the officials of the Republic. Which would have won for the Ko Lao Hui the enormous strength of the scholar class."

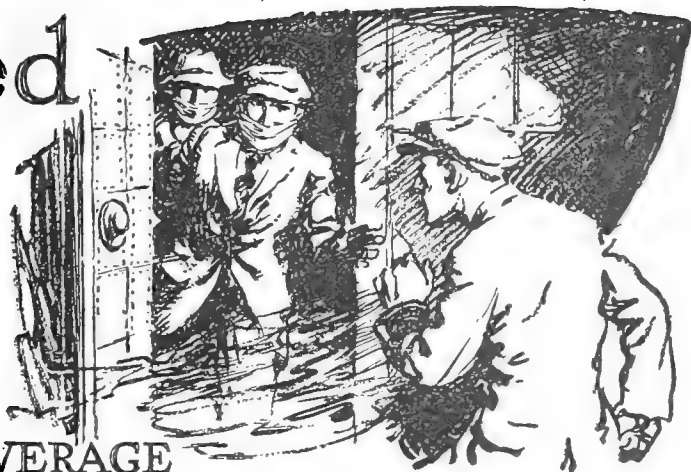
"Exactly. And that explains the influx of the *literati*—pilgrims on the way to poisoned knowledge. Many would have been deceived, beyond doubt."

"Many," I corrected him, "have been deceived, for it is only by assuming that a secret exhibition of the plates was already in progress that one can explain the escape of the old scholar, Wu Ting, with the interpretive crystal.

"One wonders how he discovered the falsity of the plates, and also what plausible tale Koshinga had arranged concerning the separate histories of the plates and the crystal during the last two thousand years. But you have not told me—although I think I know the answer—Koshinga himself; was he taken?"

"Why should you ask?" and my Chinese chief stirred uneasily in his chair. "Koshinga is a devil, even though it be proved that in flesh he is as other men. He had gone into the air; there was no sign of him."

Gyved



by
HENRY LEVERAGE

Author of "Salvage," "The Coast of Azure," etc.

OLD "VIC," the fence, who lived seven steps down from Har- mine Street, raised his head and stared at Chester Fay.

"That you?"

"Yes, Vic, it's Fay."

"What can I do, Chester?"

The visitor closed the outer door. He stepped to the aged man's side.

"I want a dozen double-x caps, a three-ounce vial of oil, and a small blasting-machine. That one I used last year will do, Vic."

"Lord! Are you going to make another touch?"

Chester Fay gripped the old man's arm. "Quick!"

"I got the nitro, Chester. Seems to me there's caps around somewhere—but——"

"Hurry, Vic."

Old Vic scratched his head.

"I'm wonderin', Chester, wot I did with that blastin'-magneto."

"You've got it somewhere, Vic. I must have it. Three of the boys are in trouble. I just received word. 'Little Emily' of Hope Hall phoned."

"Have the coppers pinched 'em?"

Chester Fay's steel-blue eyes hardened.

"Not yet, Vic. They tunneled under a big private bank and are in the vault. A sewer-pipe or water-main burst and filled the tunnel. They're caught. There's no way out for them."

"Where'd all this happen, Chester?"

"In Newark. They were trapped last

night. I'm going to try and spring them."

Old Vic released Fay's grip on his arm.

"Who's the mob, Chester?"

"All friends of yours—'Big Scar,' 'Glycerin Jimmy' an' Danny Nugent."

"Who got the word to Little Emily?"

"Joe Mink—'Weeping Willie' Mink's brother. He was outside man, Vic. He told Emily there's three feet of water in the tunnel. He broke in the bank and heard the boys tapping on the door. We've only got a few hours to save them—before the cashier opens up in the morning."

Old Vic disappeared in the direction of a back room where was stored brass, globe-valves, rabbit and the odds and ends of a fence's spoil. He reappeared with a well-wrapped vial and a handful of double-x cartridges from which dangled white-metal wires, scraped bare at the terminals.

Fay pocketed the vial of nitro-glycerin, wrapped the detonators in a handkerchief and helped Old Vic search the cellar for the blasting-generator.

"My kid was playin' with it last," said Old Vic. "He's a smart boy. He rigged up a circuit to shock a Chinaman. He had it——"

"Hurry, Vic!"

Chester Fay drew out a thin-model watch with a radium dial. His keen face flushed when he noted the time.

There was an appointment to be kept with Little Emily O'Mara at the Tube Station in Newark. Joe Mink would show

the way to the bank where the three yeggs were trapped.

"Oh, I got it," chuckled Old Vic. "Help me move them bags, Chester. The blatin'-machine is planted on the lower shelf. You know coppers come in here sometime."

Fay tossed aside a dozen bags. He dropped on one knee.

Old Vic reached and tilted the reflector of an electric globe. The light spotted on a small, dusty box. A handle and two long, silk-covered conductors were attached to the box.

"That's it, Chester."

"Sure it's working?"

"Try it."

Fay grasped the terminals of the conductors, pulled up the handle and pressed it down slowly. His muscles twitched. He dropped the wires and said to Old Vic:

"Bring me that case I left just outside the door. This will go in it all right. Get me two short pinch-bars, a set of wedges and a copper mallet."

Old Vic's fingers closed over a fifty-dollar bill when Fay left the basement, climbed the seven steps and looked to right and left on Harmine Street. A taxi stood at the nearest corner. Into it Fay sprang, set down the suitcase and said to the driver:

"Hudson Tube. Thirty-third Street. Quick!"

Fay breathed safer when he dodged through the throng on the tube platform, entered a white-enameled car and set the suitcase between his custom-made boots.

He leaned back, closed his eyes and reviewed the events of the hour that had passed. Little Emily O'Mara's phone call was startling enough.

The girl explained that she was with Joe Mink in Newark. Big Scar, Glycerin Jimmy and Danny Nugent had attempted to tunnel under Groudman's private vault, according to Mink's story. The three safe-breakers were caught like rats in a trap. Water blocked their way from the vault.

Fay opened his eyes and shifted in his seat. The story seemed plausible enough. Big Scar was always taking desperate chances. Glycerin Jimmy and Danny Nugent were numbered among the best box-men in the east.

It occurred to Fay, while the tube train dipped beneath the center of the river and

climbed the grade to the Jersey side, that Mink was the last man he would work with. Weeping Willie's brother had the reputation in the underworld of being a quitter. He evidently remained in a safe position at the entrance to the tunnel while the others of the gang did the actual work.

The train crossed the meadows, flashed by Manhattan Transfer station and entered the suburbs of Newark. Fay pulled out a pair of yellow-tinted glasses, adjusted them turned up the collar of his coat and loosened a blue-steel automatic under his left armpit. It was just as well to be careful. Mink was a coppers' mark. There might be detectives of discernment around the tube terminal.



LITTLE EMILY O'MARA greeted Fay when he emerged to the street. The girl dropped a glove and whispered—

"Follow me, Chester."

Mink was over the way, sheltered behind a news-stand. Fay set down the suitcase and eyed the crook. Little Emily motioned toward a waiting taxi.

"Just a minute, Emily," said Fay.

"It's dangerous here, Chester."

"Wait!"

Joe Mink dropped his eyes to the sidewalk.

"Come clean!" said Fay, between drawn lips. "Is this a stall—or is it right that the mob is trapped?"

"They're in bad, pal. Ain't I been workin' with them for three weeks diggin' the tunnel?"

"Big Scar said look out for the sewer-pipe. It busted when they were in th' vault. I waits. The cellar fills up in the tenement."

"I goes outside an' around to the jug. There's no watchman—except twice a night. I jimmy a window an' climbs in."

"I could hear Big Scar tryin' to spring the day door. It ain't no use. There's a time-lock on the vault. It's a two-dial combination. The cashier comes to work at eight o'clock."

Mink's face twitched.

"Come, we must leave here," suggested Little Emily.

Fay picked up the suitcase. He walked with the girl toward the taxi. Mink followed.

"Give the directions to the driver," said Fay. "Have him set us down about three blocks from the bank. I want to check up Mink's story before I go near the vault."

"Oh, it isn't a trap, Chester."

Little Emily breathed swiftly.

"I know it isn't. Poor Joe has been worried to death. He was afraid I couldn't get you. He said you were the only man who could save the boys."

Fay waited until the girl gave the driver directions where to go. He placed the suitcase in the cab, motioned for Mink and sat down beside Little Emily.

The door closed. The taxi chugged through a brightly lighted street and turned north. Fay twisted and looked back. He rubbed the oval glass.

"Anybody tailin' us?" asked Mink.

"No."

The crook started talking in a low trembling tone.

"Tough, believe me it was tough, Fay. We had a hole up through the bottom of the vault."

"Big Scar climbs in. Then Jimmy follows. Then they sends me back to watch at the other end."

"I heard water runnin'. I goes down on my hands an' knees an' the light they had in the tunnel is out—an' the pipe is busted."

"How did you get in the basement of that tenement?"

Mink leaned toward Fay.

"We rents it, Chester. We're supposed to be mattress-makers. We carries the dirt from the tunnel out in mattresses."

"When did Big Scar come from Chicago?"

"Three weeks ago."

Fay tested Mink with a second question.

"How did you know you could reach me through Little Emily?"

"Scar told me a couple days ago that if anything happened I should phone her at Hope Hall and she would get you. He thought he wouldn't be able to cut up through the vault. But he did."

Little Emily nodded. She looked through a side-window. The taxi slowed and approached the curb.

"We're here," she said. "This is three blocks from the bank."

Fay followed Joe Mink from the taxi. He turned and assisted Little Emily to alight. The girl drew the suitcase to the curb.

Mink waited until the chauffeur had driven off.

"I'll show you the tenement," he said to Fay.

"No! Stay here with Emily. Tell me where I can find the tenement."

A momentary gleam flashed through the thief's watery eyes.

"All right," he said to Fay. "You go along this street one block, turn the corner, walk two blocks south an' look for number four twenty-three."

"There's a sign over the basement door. It reads 'Hanover Mattress Factory.' You'll see the water from the busted sewer-pipe."

Fay darted a swift glance around the street. There seemed no sign of detectives or police. A lighted corner indicated an all-night drug-store. A woman crept from doorstep to doorstep.

Little Emily came to Fay's side.

"I'll wait with Joe," she whispered. "What are you afraid of, Chester?"

Fay grasped the girl's arm.

"If this is a trap it's a good one, Emily. You know the Mooray & Booman Detective Agency have sworn to get me. Mooray and Calvin Grimm of that agency would sell their souls to land me right."

"Suppose Mink turned stool for the detectives? Suppose the whole thing is a frame-up?"

"I'll go to the tenement for you."

"No. I don't want to place you in danger."

Fay raised his voice so that Mink could hear him.

"If this is a copper's trap," he declared, "I'll shoot my way through them and come after you, Mink."

"It ain't no copper's trap. Big Scar an' the two others are inside the vault. They can't get out. There ain't no way to save them except blast open the keister."

"They ain't got no tools with them. The jimmies an' drills an' center-braces are all in the tunnel—wot's flooded."

Fay nodded to Little Emily. He glided along the pavement, turned the corner and walked two blocks south. The tenement seemed deserted when he approached the steps.

He went on slowly. A man loomed from the basement's shadow.

"Hello," said Fay. "Got a light?"

A surly, suspicious face glowed when

Fay struck the proffered match to a cigaret. "Where's Division Street?" asked the cracksman.

"Division Street? Why, there ain't no such street in Newark, young fellow. And I've lived here twenty years. Twenty years I've lived here!" repeated the man.

Fay's glance had taken in an inky pool of water at the foot of the basement steps.

"What happened?" he asked.

The man's mind seemed to dwell on Fay's first question.

"There ain't no Division Street."

"Well, maybe I got it wrong. What's that water doing down there—flood?"

"Sure; sewer bust. I'm a watchman for the sewer company. Building inspector sent me to see that it didn't flood the street."

Fay dragged on his cigaret, mentioned something about finding Division or Davidson or Downing Street, and went around the corner. He looked back at the tenement. The watchman was apparently nodding and bracing himself against a half-filled ashbarrel.



SENSING danger without realizing its form, Fay walked close to the wall and passed the ornate entrance to Groudman's private bank. He caught a gleam of a steel vault. A light burned in the center of a large room, lined with brass grillwork.

There was a narrow passage between the private bank and the next building. Fay noticed a window, through which an entrance could be gained to the rear of the vault.

He went along the sidewalk, rounded the block and hurried with lanky strides toward Little Emily and Joe Mink. They stood apparently waiting for a street-car.

"All right," said Fay to Little Emily. "I've looked the tenement over. There's water in the basement. Mink's story is correct."

"I knew it was, Chester."

Mink drew his weak chin within his coat collar like a turtle hiding its head.

"I ain't goin' nearer that jug," he said, "than right here. I broke in it once. I tried to do wot I could for the mob."

Fay lifted the suitcase.

"All right; stay here!" he exclaimed. "Little Emily and I will open the vault."

Mink leaned against a lamp-post, rolled

a cigaret and lighted it. Fay saw the glow of the match. He hesitated and touched the girl's arm.

"Something tells me that this is a frame-up," he said. "I don't trust Mink."

"Why, Chester?"

Fay dropped his hand from the girl's arm. He searched the arc-lighted street. He saw no suspicious movements. A few pedestrians crossed the intersections.

It was after four o'clock. The cashier and the entire office force of the private bank were expected at eight.

"You know Calvin Grimm and Mooray, Emily?" said Fay. "They have sworn to trap me."

The girl drew Fay toward the corner.

"If they had wanted to catch you they would have been waiting at the Tube Terminal, Chester."

"They wouldn't have got me in the act. There's a lot of difference, Emily, between getting caught before you open a safe and afterward."

"But Joe Mink seems so sincere. And there's water in the tenement basement."

"You may be right, Emily. I'm going to take the chance. There's no way of finding out if Big Scar and his mob are in the vault except through blasting off the door."

"You stall for me outside the bank. I'll go through the alley, open the window Mink says he jimmied and——"

Fay shifted the weight of the suitcase. He pulled down his cap, loosened his revolver, and advanced toward the alley near Groudman's private bank.

"Throw gravel or a stone against the window if you see anything suspicious, Emily," he said over his shoulder.

He darted in the alley, pulled on gloves after setting the suitcase on the cobbles, and examined the sash of a small opening at the back of the building. He pressed the window up and saw the marks of a poorly used jimmy. Joe Mink's story dovetailed.

Fay carried a fountain-pen flashlight. He spotted the light from this on the side of the vault. He listened intently.

A faint sound came from somewhere within the bank building. It resembled a mouse scratching or gnawing.

Abandoning caution, Fay lifted the suitcase, set it inside the window, grasped the sill with his gloved hands and vaulted

through the opening. He touched the floor, rebounded and crouched—with every nerve tingling.

The sound he heard at first increased in volume. There was somebody inside the vault. The yeggs, concluded Fay, were trying to signal Mink.

Opening the suitcase, Fay removed the pinch-bars, mallet and blasting-machine and set them on one corner of a rug. He intended working rapidly in order to avoid being detected by a night watchman.

Old Vic's three-ounce vial of nitro-glycerin was ample enough to open two vaults if used in the right place. Fay knew the right place. He was rated the third cracksmen living.

The blasting-machine, or magneto, was an instrument calculated to detonate double-x cartridges by an electric current. Fay often worked with a similar device.

He felt on familiar grounds when he began driving in wedges so that the great front door of the vault could be sprung a fractional part of an inch near the hinges. The heavy copper mallet made little sound.

One wedge broke. Fay tried another. He straightened and listened.

Footsteps sounded on the pavement outside the bank. Little Emily passed. She returned walking the opposite way. The street was clear of watchmen.

Fay moved, not too quickly, to a washstand behind the grilled cages of the bank, selected a piece of softened soap, pinched this between his fingers and approached the vault. He did not intend making any unnecessary noise in the operation of opening the door. Only amateurs and those unfamiliar with nitro-glycerin did that.

There was a method of using gradual shots of soup which was best calculated to spring a lock and hinges. Sometimes ten explosions were required to open a big vault.

Old Vic's detonators were tiny affairs which would explode with a sound like a cap pistol. The blasting-machine saved lighting fuses. Smoke from fuses often betrayed safe-blowers.



FAY found his thoughts turning to Joe Mink. He adjusted the detonator, soaped it, poured in a quarter-ounce of nitro and connected the dangling leads to the terminals of the blasting-machine. Again his mind dwelt on the cowardly crook.

He set off the first blast by way of experiment. The upper right hinge of the vault sprung a sixteenth of an inch. The opening made by the racking power of nitro left room for a larger charge.

Alternately filling the crack between the vault door and the frame with glycerin, inserting the cap and pulling up and down the handle of the blasting-machine, Fay succeeded in forcing the door away from its chamfering.

The bank filled with fumes. The windows vibrated at each explosion. A heavy pounding sounded inside the vault. Little Emily nervously passed in front of the building.

Through the acrid mist Fay worked like a man possessed. He knew that exact amount of glycerin to use.

He made no false moves. He employed the dangerous explosive in the same manner as a series of wedges—each charge being calculated to assist the charge that went before it.

There came, when the door fell from its hinges, a shower of gravel on the front windows of the bank. Little Emily had signaled danger.

Fay seized up a pinch-bar, kicked the blasting-generator to one side and advanced through the fumes that hid the day-door, which was built of thin steel plates.

Many things happened within seconds. Little Emily's white face appeared at the alley window.

"Look out, Chester! The detectives are coming."

Fay reached and touched the day or inner door. There was a single combination knob on this door. It turned from inside.

The door swung open. A man leaped out, followed by another. They snatched handkerchiefs from their mouths and nostrils and closed in upon Fay.

He backed step by step toward the window. He heard Little Emily cry a warning. There ensued a struggle in the alley. The girl was caught.

Fay dropped the pinch-bar and whipped out his automatic. He coiled a gloved finger around the trigger.

The two men who had sprung from the vault were not yeggs. One was Calvin Grimm. The other was Mooray, of the Mooray & Booman Detective Agency.

"We got you, Fay!" grunted Calvin Grimm. "Don't use that gun. The place is surrounded."

Fay pressed his back against the window-frame. He felt a pair of reaching hands glide over his neck.

He twisted, threw the revolver into Calvin Grimm's face, dodged the dazed detectives, sprang over the grillwork at the front of the bank and broke the window with his elbow. A bullet clipped the glass. Fay heard a roar of rage when he fell face forward to the sidewalk.

He was on his knees and to his feet with a single motion. Glass showered about him.

A detective stood across the street. Another ran out from the alley. Fay heard Little Emily calling.

Dodging bullets by twisting and turning, the cracksman gained the entrance to the alley, darted through the gloom and sprang upon the back of the detective who held the girl. He throttled the man with a grip beneath the ears and chin.

"Get away," Fay said to the girl. "Run down the alley. I'll hold this fellow."

"Where's your revolver, Chester?"

"I haven't got it. Look out. Run, Emily!"

Little Emily hesitated. She saw Fay's straining face over the struggling detective's shoulder. His eyes were commanding. She turned and ran in the direction of an arc-lighted street.

Fay pressed his knee into the detective's side, lifted him and swung his body toward the wall of the bank building. A shot crimsoned the gloom. A burly form crawled through the window and dropped to the cobbles.

Far off where the arcs glowed Fay saw Little Emily waiting. There was a chance to join the girl.

He thought of Joe Mink's treachery. Big Scar, Glycerin Jimmy and Danny Nugent had never been near the vault. The mattress factory, the water in the basement of the tenement, the watchman, the entire affair was a frame-up. Grimm and Mooray had set the trap.

Fay released the detective, turned swiftly and, seeing two menacing revolvers covering him from two steady arms, put up his hands. He said with a short, catching laugh:

"Don't shoot, boys. There's been some mistake here."

"Mistake be —," growled Calvin Grimm. "Keep those hands up, Fay, or I'll croak you sure."

Fay looked at Mooray, the second armed detective. There was no way to avoid being shot if he attempted to escape.

He heard the clinking of handcuff chains. Practised hands tapped his pockets and clothing.

One arm was jerked down. A cuff slipped over his right wrist. The lock snapped shut.

"That'll hold him!" said Calvin Grimm.

Fay glanced through the alley. A shadow moved between his position and the far-arc. Little Emily was hiding in a back doorway. He turned his head and slipped off his gloves.

He saw the determined faces of the detectives, the ready guns, the smoke drifting through the bank window. He heard a roar from a night watchman who had been attracted by the shots. A fourth detective came out of the bank and joined Mooray.

"We might as well move on, chief," he said. "The city police will be here in a minute. The watchman rang for them."

Grimm pocketed his revolver, snatched at the handcuff chain, opened the dangling cuff and slipped it on his left wrist.

"I'll take him to our office," he growled. "We'll sweat him about those other jobs before we give him up. This fellow opened three banks that are under our protection."

"You've got the wrong man," Fay said. "I demand to be taken to police headquarters."

Grimm wound the chain around his wrist. He jerked Fay to his side.

"Somebody go inside the bank," he ordered, "and pass out those pinch-bars, caps and the blasting-generator. We'll use them as evidence."

 FAY thought of Joe Mink. That stool-pigeon had undoubtedly fled to New York. He would be rewarded by the detectives until the day came when some member of the underworld found his hiding-place. Treachery was usually paid for with a bullet.

Grimm sensed what was passing in Fay's mind.

"Thought you was a smart, clever man, eh?"

Fay tightly closed his lips. Mooray

handed out the blasting-machine, the caps, the vial, two pinch-bars and the fountain-pen flashlight. Grimm jabbed Fay in the waist.

"Take that generator," he ordered. "Carry it for me, Chester. Put the caps and flashlight in his pocket, Mike. That's it!

"Now I'll take him to our office. You men scout around and try to find the girl. Try the Tube Terminal and the trolley loop. Bring her up to the office when you find her."

"Do you think you can handle Fay alone?" asked Mooray.

"Sure, chief. I'll kill him deader than — if he makes a false move."

Fay protested when Grimm tightened the handcuff chain. He was dragged after the burly detective. He tested the weight of the blasting-generator and wondered if he could swing it upon Grimm's head.

The detective was wary. He let out the chain to the last link, edged toward the sidewalk, avoided a staring night rounder and pulled Fay around the corner.

"I've got a smoke-wagon, Chester," he said. "I don't want to use it—but you know me."

"I demand to be taken to the chief of police. I did not rob that bank. You detectives are accessory to whatever attempt was made to open the vault."

"Aw, come on! Quite that kid-glove stuff!"

Fay's mind worked in split-seconds. The street was dark between the arc-lamps. A pool of water glistened on the asphalt.

Somewhere a clock struck five slow notes. A feel of dawn was in the air.

Grimm glanced around. He eyed the heavy blasting-machine which Fay carried in his left hand.

"Come on!" he snarled and jerked the handcuff chain.

Again the detective looked back. He thrust out a brutal jaw.

"Pick up that wire," he said.

"Pick it up yourself," said Fay.

One of the terminals of the blasting-generator trailed on the sidewalk. Fay held the other terminal between his fingers. His hand gripped the generator's handle. He hung back on the chain that connected him with Grimm's left wrist.

The detective paused, tapped his pocket

suggestively, edged around Fay and reached for the end of the wire. He grunted when he stooped over. One eye was on the cracksmen.

Fay was cool enough. He lowered the blasting-generator to the stone walk, waited a fractional part of a second, then pressed down on the handle.

A current of electricity made its circuit from Grimm's fingers, through the detective's body, across the handcuff chain and by the way of Fay's arm to the generator.

Grimm twisted and doubled. He attempted to let go of the terminal.

His muscles knotted. His face flushed. He bent his knees and slowly sank to the pavement.

Fay completed the down-stroke of the generator. He jerked up the handle. Again he pressed it. He felt every nerve and muscle of his arm tingling.

He had more endurance and greater resistance than the detective. He had freedom at stake.

"Good —, stop that thing!" cried Grimm.

Fay had the detective at his mercy. There was no letting go the wire's terminal unless the current stopped. This current was at least seven thousand volts. It was of low amperage but high in shocking-power.

"I'll let you go—you stool-pigeon fancier!" snapped Fay. "You go where you belong—this time. How do you like that?"

Fay jammed the handle down, pulled it up, stretched the handcuff chain and watched Grimm writhing on the stones. The detective's eyes popped from their sockets. His left arm was doubled into a knot. Agony showed in his features.

"Roll over," said Fay. "Get against that lamp-post. There. Where's the key to these cuffs?"

"Go—go—to —!"

Fay felt his muscles bunching and relaxing. He had to outnerve the detective in order to escape. He glanced around. There was no one in sight.

"Where's that key?"

Grimm sat down, dropped his head, and stared mutely at the terminal that seemed to cling to his palm and fingers like a hot serpent.

"Where's the handcuff key?" repeated Fay. "Which pocket is it in?"

A gliding step, a low voice, and the figure of Little Emily caused Fay to redouble his efforts with the magneto.

"Go through his pockets," he whispered in a strained voice. "Search him, Emily. Frisk him good."

"He can't let go the wire. I can't let go the generator. You can touch him without danger. He's going to faint."

The girl looked up and down the street. She dropped on one knee beside the detective. She unbuttoned his coat apprehensively. Fay pressed the generator's handle and felt his arm twisting from the current.

"The key. The handcuff key," he breathed. "Look in his vest pocket, Emily. We must break this circuit. I can't let go now without letting him go."

Little Emily drew out Grimm's watch and chain. She felt in the pockets of the detective's vest. Her fingers came away dangling a tiny steel key.

"That's it," said Fay.

"—you!" muttered Grimm.

The girl replaced the watch and chain, rose from her knee, approached Fay and touched his right wrist.

"It's all right," he said. "Unlock the cuffs. I'll keep hold of it so that the current won't be broken."

The cuff clicked open. Fay held the chain and moved it slowly toward the generator.

He touched the metal to the opposite binding-post on the box. He had a circuit through Grimm's body without endangering himself.

He worked the machine vigorously.

He wrapped the chain around the binding post.

"Get his revolver, Emily. It's in the right breech pocket."

The girl pulled out Grimm's police regulation revolver.

Fay took it from her, glanced at the filled chambers and lifted his right hand from the handle of the machine. He went to Grimm.

"So you laid down like a dog," he said. "Come!"

Little Emily's voice contained a warning.

"Don't kill him, Chester."

"I'd like to find out where Mink went."

Grimm rubbed a twitching wrist and stared at the wire which he had dropped to the sidewalk. He attempted to twist the cuff on his left hand. He spat and swayed.

Fay cocked the revolver.

"There's somebody coming," said Little Emily. "I'll stay while you run away," she added loyally.

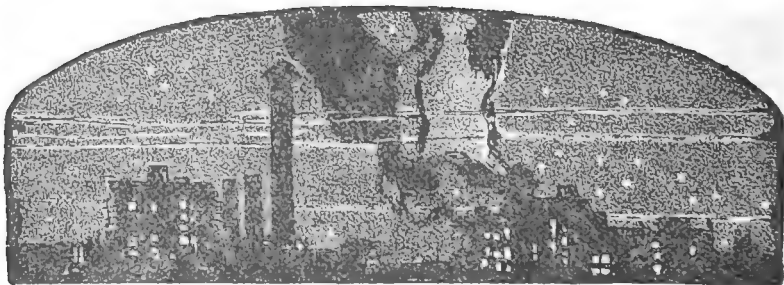
Fay glanced at a shadowy form—three blocks away. He shook his head, stooped, opened the right handcuff, ran it around the lamp-post and gyved Grimm's free wrist. He jerked the detective's arms.

Little Emily hurried across the street after Fay. They turned a friendly corner. Ahead showed an avenue.

"You forgot the blasting-generator," she said.

Fay smiled keenly.

"We'll let Grimm have that, Emily. He ought to have something for this night's work."





The Better Head*

by

ALEXANDER HULL

DAN SWAYD was his name and he was Irish, yet at the same time a man that kept his counsel. A grizzled, leather-faced, sun and sea tanned man, with astonishingly blue eyes.

A deep man—or a fool. Most likely the latter, for he cared nothing about gold. Proof enough that—surely?

Besides, he was impervious to the fever; he might have gone—he did go—where others would have died like flies of the deadly Polynesian blackwater. But not for gold. They had ascertained that on the beach beyond doubt.

And if further evidence were needed that the man was mad, it was present and cogent. He had no thirst!

They had seen him now and then go into the bar, order a drink, taste the vitriolic stuff that was served him, taste it again, shake his bushy mane with an air of hopeless disappointment and go out again, leaving his glass two-thirds full.

It was never wasted. Purdy always could find a thirsty beach-comber without qualms. Or, not being too fastidious, could drink it himself.

Now little blunt-nosed, inquisitive Dutch and British gunboats are the omnipresent spoil-sports of those islands and seas. But in those days the measure of a man's might was the measure of his gain. Yet there were few that had much of it, though there was wealth without stint if a man were

strong enough and wily enough to get it.

Those days were free indeed! Any man might carve out his fortune unhindered by summary courts or the laws of the high seas, might hew it out of nature or out of his fellow men's bodies. All one, which method he used. There was no special taint upon either way.

They were all gold-mad then, and nothing could hold their contemptuous attention but the legend of the yellow metal, strikes and the dim rumors of strikes. Upon a mere whispered say-so men would be off within the hour over a thousand miles of sea and bush and mountain—for nothing, or almost that, in the end.

And they came back, the strongest and luckiest of them, from the jungled hills, with their pitiful pocketfuls of dust, and promptly their inextinguishable thirst engulfed them. Outside the beach bar of mornings they lay about in grotesque attitudes like dead monkeys fallen from a tree; they woke there at length penniless and sick with the white flame of madness and the black ash of disillusion in their brains, and they went "on the beach" or they strayed inevitably into the Back Beyond for more dust and maybe death of the fever or the crocodiles or the hungry little brown men in the bush. And no one cared much.

So if the admittedly crazy Irishman, coming out from his beach hut in the scented coolness of morning, picked up a bit of human jetsam and took it to his hut and

* This is an "Off-the-Trail" story. See second contents page.

fed it and clothed it too, mayhap, and whispered strange things in vague hints in its ears as they sat there in the shade of the great casuarina-tree, looking out on the climbing sapphire sea, what did it matter? Less than nothing, I assure you.

Or if, scarcely noted, that jetsam journeyed with Swayd into the tangle of green jungle and never reemerged, what did that matter either? A thousand men had succumbed to that smiling but malevolent land. One more—and he but the drift of the beach? I tell you it was scarcely noted!

Of quiet nights when the men in the bar were feverish and ribald and mad as March hares Dan Swayd sat silently smoking before his hut, staring out upon the phosphorescent sea, himself adrift upon a sea—of poesy. He did not hear the obscene laughter or the raucous cursing that foully pierced the virginal night. They never penetrated the veil of his abstraction.

It was a big island that lay mysterious and unfathomed behind him. Over a thousand miles it stretched to the east. There was gold in it, as these shouting fools in Purdy's had proved to their cost.

Gold! He shook his head over it. How could it catch hold on them so? In what lay its ruthless grip? The stuff did not even glitter!

No—he could not understand it; he could not understand them. Wild pigs they were, greedily rooting the inviolate jungle—for gold!

He could not hope to understand them, Long ago he had realized that he was a man apart, a man of dreams, of dim spiritual yearnings as yet unsatisfied—a poet!

There were other things in that great island than gold, the insensate and utilitarian. There were living things that touched a man's imagination with fire.

Birds! Shy, flying jewels! Living, feathered lyrics on wings, real wings, no lame pinions of the clumsy rimester! Birds of Paradise!

It was a big island and there was no other island like it for them if one knew where and how to get them. And there weren't too many of them; one's pleasure in them would never be glutted by excess.

Nor was the quest of them too easy. He had never trapped more than half a dozen of them himself. And yet in his chests he had scores of them.

It was the little brown men of the uplands who had caught them. He did not know how.

And in getting them he had taken his life in his hands. Well, life was a thing that scarcely mattered unless one attained his desires. And if attaining them meant for him risks—well, he would not quarrel with risk.

Birds of Paradise! Ah, the exquisite, shimmering skins of them that he had, packed away securely in his chests and hidden craftily from the chance spoiler! Worth more gold they were, even to the caloused schooner-captains, had they suspected he had so many of them, than any treasure those sea-rovers had ever possessed.

Aye, but worth more, infinitely more, in—say in Europe? Why sell them here, then, at such sacrifice?

Europe was his market—and his home. And in Paris, in St. Petersburg, in Brussels, in Vienna, there were women, soft of body, fair of skin, lithe, slender creatures, exotic of taste. . . .

And he sat there dreaming of them. He was a poet, an esthete. Thwarted had been his youth. He was one made for fine things, fine women, fine linen, fine living. And he had been perversely born under the curse of poverty.

With no appetite in him save for fineness, he had lived upon husks and the gross leavings of ignorant fools. There had been no place for him save that which he had won with his determined right arm.

Well, he was not so old yet! He would take his fine things with a hunger whetted the keener by long abstinence. Another year, with good fortune, and . . .

He dreamed again of the pampered exquisites to whose bizarre tastes he would give form and line and—feather! All, save the choicest of the skins, he would sell—by Heaven. They were worth a king's ransom, no less—and those few he would keep to bestow perhaps upon his favorites. . . .

That one of gold and lavender and pale rose, now. What an unbelievable thing it was! And she that should wear it— He pictured her, scented, slender-stemmed, a walking flower, yet flesh, warm and tinted, that needs must be clothed and adorned and—loved.

And there were other splendid creatures, too—for each array of shimmering feathers a beauty . . .

 MANY days' journey, far up, nearly seven thousand feet upon the hump-backed shoulder of the highest peak of the nearest range, dwelt Nganoni, the devil-devil. And the dun, thatched house of Nganoni, too, faced a sea, a sea of tossing green jungle, spread far beneath, stretching to the dimly discerned line that was the sea.

Nganoni did not go down into that jungle that sent up its breath in great billows of warm, sweetish, yet acrid atmosphere. Nganoni's tribesmen went down in those tangled fastnesses and brought back wild pigs and loot and women and sometimes heads. Indifferently good heads, for the most part.

Nganoni felt no covetousness. He had enough of such heads. There was little or nothing to be gained from them. Such wisdom as was theirs he justly felt that he had learned in the long ago when he was young and agile, when his years were aflower like the wild jasmine.

Now he was growing old and very wise, and he no longer had any need or liking for such junketings, all very well when a man was young and had his way to make. It was because of the heads that he, Nganoni, was so wise and so rich and need take no thought for the morrow.

He had very many of them, almost a hundred, and now he need do little more than sit in his great hut and turn them, for days and weeks at a time, upon the thongs by which they were suspended over his careful fire. And as he turned them he talked to them, patiently, tirelessly questioning them.

And they told him secrets, all the masterful secrets which they had wrested from life, so that he had now the wisdom of nearly a hundred heads, and of many, many races. Great and deep knowledge—so much that he had forgotten some of it. Was that not a plethora of wisdom?

Yet he was unsated. While as for that which he had forgotten— Never mind; he would go back and inquire of those same heads again when he had completed the circle.

Nganoni sat there, blinking owlshly in the sharp wood-smoke, and he looked upon his treasures, and they seemed to him very beautiful, very precious. No other devil-devil, he was sure, had so many or so finely cured. He had seen many heads down below in the early days, and they had been poor

things at best, drawn, emaciated and sunken in.

No, one must admit that it was only up here that the art of curing heads was properly known. And up here he was the acknowledged master among masters. No rumor had reached him that he had a rival.

He was content with them. They were the highest achievement of a very high art.

There were brown Malays from Java and the Straits Settlements; Sea Dyaks from Borneo; Bugis from Makassar; and from Mindanao and Cebu the wily little hillmen of the Philippines; there were Chinamen, almond-eyed and yellow and wrinkled and evil of mind; there were the heads of a whole Albino family from the high mountains to the east—he had paid a price for those—what matter; was he not rich?—and there, too, were the heads of the wisest of his neighbors—he had watched them gain wisdom as a ripening coconut gains girth and sweetness and oil, and when he had deemed them ripe enough he had known how to cut them down to dry—there were children's heads there, too, a few, but these he did not prize so highly, and he did not wish for more—there are a few things only that children know; there could be but few when their heads are so small—there were the blond heads of two white women, taken in a wreck on the coast and brought to him in a time of peace by a runner, for a good price, and these he prized greatly; there must be great wisdom and subtlety and cunning and trickiness in them—true, he had not got much from them as yet, but one day, no doubt, he would; he must talk to them oftener and more persuasively—and there were the heads of more than fifteen white men—a Finn, two Italians, a Greek, three Spaniards, a Frenchman, a Russian, three Dutchmen, two Germans and three Englishmen.

He knew them all. He could name their tribes by looking at them. The man who had brought them, living, to him had explained them carefully as any merchant might point out the merits of the goods he has to sell.

He had known this Swayd for a long time. They were the best of friends. It was good to trade with a man that, if only dimly, understood one.

And yet that man was a fool, as were, he believed, all white *taubadas*. He exchanged heads for the skins of birds—heads in which were concealed for the seeking of the patient

and crafty all secrets and powers and wisdoms!

He was a fool. But—he should have the skins as long as he brought heads. It was a good bargain.

So Nganoni sent out his men to trap the flying jewels while he squatted in his devil-smelling hut beneath his growing circle of grim heads and pondered the great gulf fixed between his sensible goal and the daft whimsies of the *taubada*, Swayd.

It was a strange mystery, and as yet too intricate for his plumbing.

Nganoni reflected that Swayd, for all that he was a fool, had a fine head, big and tawny and full, unquestionably, of a certain and special wisdom. Perhaps if Nganoni had that head it might be plain to him why the white man valued a bird more highly than a head.

What sort of wisdom was that? Or was it any at all? It was a head at any rate more wise than any of those heads he had brought up here, for its wisdom had sufficed to bring them, whereas theirs had only misled them to swing and turn upon the thongs that spun over Nganoni's fire. It must therefore be a wise head.

And Nganoni had none quite like it. He had studied it with a practised eye when the Irishman had sat—there opposite him—by his fire, bargaining over the Russian's head.

He, Nganoni, had had to pay Swayd's price in the end, if he was to get another head by the same source. That, too, evidenced wisdom in the *taubada*.

And when Swayd had gone, Nganoni had examined the heads again, all of them, to make sure. No! He had none quite like it. Not one of them was so fine.

Presently, then, he decided he would get that head also. It should complete his library of wisdom. He was growing old. When he lacked but one head to complete that circle about his blackened, greasy rafters he would finish it out with the blue-eyed Irishman's head, which was such an excellent head. It would dry beautifully.

And then no longer would he buy heads, but he would sit by the fire-place and take them in his hands one by one and talk to them in a low, crooning persuasive voice. He would lure from them thus their wisdom. He would learn all things. They would tell him.

Wisdom was very good. It would be a pleasant life.

So it was that both Nganoni, the mountinside Papuan, and Swayd, the blue-eyed Celt, were poets. Practically minded poets, too, coining their poetry into the cash of this world, Swayd into the lovely feathered marvels that he would one day sell for fabulous sums, and Nganoni into wisdom, that pearl of the ages.



THE morning that Swayd picked up Paul, alias "Goldie," Anderson on the beach the latter was not drunk, though he had certainly been that but yesterday. However, he was very angry.

Clad in once white dungarees and little else save a tattered and weather-worn hat, he stood in the white, granulated coral beneath the bitter sun, that malignant sphere of molten copper, and cursed impartially all things created, including himself and the day of his untimely birth.

He had had perhaps only one drink too many, and he had been robbed. Robbed like a ninny!

He, one of the hardest, most finished reprobates in the Seven Seas! By Heaven, "nanny" was the word!

He cursed himself anew with meticulous, awful intensity and in rigorous detail. Thirty pounds. No great store, but sufficient to stand between a man and his going on the beach.

It was an axiom that there was nothing to be gotten out of Purdy, so he supposed he must go on the beach—for a while. He was too resourceful entirely to stay there long. He was a veritable cork of a man, with an ingenious brain, and he couldn't stay down.

Probably he would find a native girl that he could seduce into doing for him until he had thought up some way to beat the world again. He didn't care much for native girls, of course. . . Still, anything was better than foraging for himself in this damnable heat.

If he had the slightest idea who had taken his thirty pounds he would lay hold of the man by the heels and shake his pockets inside out, if he didn't do worse. But he hadn't, of course.

It was at this point in his vicious reflections that he caught sight of Swayd crunching along the coral. Ah, Swayd! Wait now!

He had heard rumors of this Swayd. Daft, was he? Maybe. He didn't look it though.

If Goldie Anderson were a judge of men—and quite without conceit Goldie might be said at least to have had opportunitites for judging—Swayd was no ninny. He was a damnably competent-looking beggar!

He had heard rumors. What were they now? Oh, yes! It was just whispered now and then—he had paid little attention—that Swayd's protégés were rather more frequent than lasting.

He picked them up, the scum of the beach, every one knew that. But where did he put them down?

Ah, that was a horse of another color. Nobody knew—or cared, particularly.

In this present case, however, it was a question that had a rather special concern. He recalled now that there had been various speculations, quite in the line of a joke only.

"Tilly of the Bar" had said, had Tilly, with a giggle, "she shouldn't wonder if he fatted them up and ate 'em, syne as the bloomin' bushmen of the Back Beyond, so she shouldn't!"

"Balmy" Swayd they had called him about the bar, and they had agreed with buxom, bad Tilly that he probably did, and had let it go at that.

Goldie Anderson now relented somewhat against Fate. She had sent him Swayd! And as for the fattening process—oh, he was quite agreeable to that.

And as for the eating—he smiled grimly—put it euphemistically. . . . Swayd wouldn't find him exactly tender.

Swayd, approaching, stopped at length before him and smiled faintly over the heated flow of his language.

"I take it you have not been used well?" he suggested.

"Robbed," said Goldie laconically.

"Yes," said the other reflectively. "They would attend to that I believe—quite nicely—at Purdy's. Hungry?"

"Why, no. Not yet," said Goldie carelessly.

"But very thirsty."

"All of that," admitted Goldie, "you may be sure. And man alive, the head on me!"

"Yes," acquiesced Swayd politely. "It takes hold on a man's guts, does Purdy's liquor, and it eats into his brain most damnably like an acid. I've never been able to drink it.

"But it's no better you'll be getting fast, if you'll pardon me, by standing in this sun.

If you care to accept my hospitality for a space, Mr.——"

By Heaven, the man had manners! Good Lord—manners in Polynesia! Here was a lark indeed. Nevertheless, while Goldie affected to despise manners he had at heart a slinking respect for the man that could show them—always providing, of course, he could show himself at the same time a man.

"Paul Anderson," he said. "Goldie they call me mostly."

Swayd looked him over and smiled in a fashion that Goldie found fascinating.

"Would you mind removing your hat for just one moment?"

Goldie felt his temper oozing away at his toes' ends. There was no denying Swayd had a way with him. He might have retorted very differently upon another man, but here he had no wish to be outdone in the genteel.

"I would not," he said graciously, and doffed his battered remnant.

"Thank you," said Swayd, waving an instant satisfaction. "Goldie, of course! How could it be otherwise with that fine blond shock of hair? Well, Mr. Anderson, what would you say to a cup of lime-juice—not cold perhaps, but, let us say, cool?"

"I'd say, Mr. Swayd," replied Goldie promptly, "that you were God's own gentleman, and you'd saved my life!"

Swayd smiled again with that attractive twinkle in his eyes.

"Come then," he said, and led the way to his hut.

Anderson followed him, wondering. This was the sort of thing that scarcely would happen to a stony-broke vagabond like himself anywhere in the world, much less in these seas. It was quite incredible unless Swayd had, as they'd jokingly averred, something up his sleeve.

What was Swayd's lay? He had one, of course. Goldie could see at a glance that the man was no fool, and he himself was no such fool as to believe this man—or any man for that matter—would pick him up for his company.

What was his lay? Well, he would know soon enough, no doubt.

They twined through the fringe of trees skirting the beach and presently emerged upon a little clearing. Swayd's house, built native fashion upon stilts facing the sea, was shaded and roomy.

Goldie perceived he should live here, providing that was Swayd's intention regarding him, more comfortably than he had lived in many years. On the bamboo platform, under the thatched eave which was extended to make a veranda, Swayd paused and, motioning hospitably as if it were quite the usual thing, and he a fine gentleman welcoming a fine guest, said—

"Pray enter, Mr. Anderson."

And Goldie went in.



THAT night Swayd spoke agreeably of many things. He was, he said, by way of being somewhat of a philosopher, and he went a fair way, it was Goldie's opinion, toward proving it.

Before they slept that night Goldie understood—though there was nothing definite said along that line, only such vague straws as "One day I must show you where that big crocodile lies, Mr. Anderson," or "One day we must thresh that question out between us"—that he was to stay as long as he wished.

Very good! It was a snug berth to stumble into. Aye, and Swayd was a queer duck, too.

Where did he get the money to live like this? Doing visibly nothing? Worse—scattering his substantial crumbs to the hungry birds of pray that haunted the beach.

It didn't cost a fortune, maybe, but it cost a plenty. What was his lay?

Precisely nothing at all was Goldie's ultimate conclusion. For the perfect days passed by like flawless diamonds told on a string, and he saw and heard—nothing.

And this was not to his mind. Swayd was an interesting talker and an excellent host, but one tires of talk after six weeks' steady diet, and if there was nothing to be gained here—oh yes, he had thought of cards, but he had nothing for stakes; besides, Swayd invariably beat him, and he knew his man too well to risk the raw work of cheating—why stay? And he grew restless. Then one night Captain Dixon and the schooner *Lucy May* beat in and was bound, he heard, Sydney way. Good! The captain and he had seen evil days and evil ways together. The captain certainly would stake him to passage. He would find the captain, he knew, at Purdy's. He went there that night.

But he didn't find the captain there.

Strange, that. He went back to the house of Swayd.

There was a light. Inside two men were talking.

He crept closer. They were Swayd and Captain Dixon. He heard the jingle of coins. He risked discovery with his head half in the door. He could not see them.

And then suddenly he thought—

"Why not be open about it?"

Was he not a privileged guest? He walked boldly in.

Between the two men on the table lay a little heap of gorgeous purple feathers. Good Lord, what color! He had never seen anything like them.

And Goldie knew a little something of the value of such things, too. They were worth money—much more money than Captain Dixon would ever pay for them.

Swayd was a fool to be selling them to him. Dixon would cheat the very eye-teeth out of a man.

He would tell Swayd when the captain was gone—er, no. Upon second thoughts he wouldn't tell him. What was the use?

"Hullo," he said genially. "And how's Captain Dixon?"

Dixon looked at him for a moment sardonically.

"Well enough to do business and navigate a boat," he said.

Then he turned to the skins and placed them carefully one by one in a small wooden box by his elbow, counting them aloud as he did so—

"One—two—three—twelve, all told."

He rose with the box under his left arm and shook hands with Swayd.

"Lying over, captain?" asked Goldie pleasantly.

Any thought he had had of leaving was gone now and the inquiry was merely his idea of politeness.

"No. Sailing now," said the captain brusquely.

Goldie smiled.

"I should think you'd lie over—but no. You're the same bold daredevil! Seeing what night navigation is in these parts——"

"It's dangerous," said the captain with a sudden glint in his eye. "Why so it is, but I'll tell you, my bucko, there's other things dangerous besides that, and don't you forget it! Ain't that so, Swayd?"

"Oh, unquestionably," said Swayd smoothly.

And there was a glint in his eye as well. The captain laughed boisterously and went out.

Anderson turned abruptly upon Swayd.

"Where did you get them?" he demanded. "And how?"

Swayd laughed a little.

"Oh, come now," he said. "Doesn't it occur to you that—in short, my good man, that it's my business?"

"Good enough," said Goldie promptly.

"Well—I want to make it mine."

"Naturally," smiled Swayd, drumming carelessly upon the table with his fingertips.

"You're not telling?"

"Obviously not. Why should I?"

Goldie's heat was running away with him.

"I'll tell you what, now!" he exploded. "I can camp on your track like a beagle hound and——"

"The usual return of gratitude, I believe," said Swayd without offense. "I'll tell you this much though, Mr. Anderson. There are more to be gotten if one knows where to look, but it's dangerous looking."

"You're not the first one that's gone after me this way. It's the return I get for giving the swine food."

"True, they were poor carrion physically for the most part, not such men as you. And they couldn't stand the pace. It was—— unpleasant but no fault of mine that one or two of them ended in the little brown jungle men's bellies, or that one or two others——"

"I came through each time—yes. But then, look at me. And the last time I swore I'd had enough of it. I'd go a partnering no more. They're on my conscience, poor devils."

"What's that to me?" cried Anderson. "They're not on mine! And am I a poor specimen? Am I unfit? Or am I as good a man as you?"

He was indeed a fine creature, a big man with long, lean, stringy muscles.

Swayd looked at him mockingly.

"As good as I?" he inquired. "No. You are not, Mr. Anderson. Still you're a very good man in your way."

"The risk's mine!" said Anderson.

And Swayd merely shook his head.

"I tell you," said Anderson! more reasonably. "We'll play cards for it. If I win——"

"But you wouldn't win," Swayd reminded him.

There was a good deal in that, Goldie knew.

"Then we'll simply cut," he suggested.

"And if you win I tell you," laughed Swayd. "And if I win—what do I get? It seems rather a one-sided arrangement to my jaundiced eye."

"I'll tell you!" said Anderson desperately. "I'll be your man—I'll be your slave—for a year—do anything you order me to do—I'll——"

"Is there anything you could do—that I'd want?" asked Swayd.

"I'm not exactly a fool," said Anderson.

"And neither are you. Think it over."

"Is there anything a clever man like you would want a handy man like me, without scruples, to do—or isn't there? I leave it to you!"

"True," said Swayd more amenably.

"There might be things. I seem to think of one or two. And you'd play fair with me?"

"By Heavens, I'd play fair!"

Swayd laughed and nodded.

"Come then; I'll cut with you," he said.

And he pulled at the warped drawer and brought out cards and laid them on the table.

With a prayer to such gods as he knew Anderson leaned over and carefully cut the tray of hearts. And cursed the scurvy trick his gods had played him.

Swayd, smiling nonchalantly, held up the seven.

Then he laughed again.

"Anderson," he said, "you're a good fellow. I like you. And upon second thoughts—there isn't, after all, anything that I want you to do."

"As to the birds—well, I've needed a partner for a long time. To tell the truth, I don't much fancy going in alone."

"Up in the range the beggars are friendly enough, but between here and there—well, four eyes are better than two. You know the bush well enough to understand that."

"You ought to fill the bill. I've been watching you these two months. None of the others would do—but you—you're an experienced man—hard—and you're afraid of nothing, I take it. . . . Together, we might——"

His eyes were taking fire.

"Man!" he said. "There'll be money in it! Till lately I've been able to get so few."

"But Back Beyond there I've a whole tribe trapping them for me—Ngononi, the devil-devil, is doing the thing for me. The little brown beggars are no end afraid of him. I tell you they'll have got me a lot of them by now! And, Goldie—not a word to any one—remember that!"

"Trust me!" said Goldie fervently.

"And we'll sell them," said Swayd. "We'll sell them—to Dixon, that hoary old thief? By Heaven, no! I've a trick worth a dozen of that. We'll sell them in—Paris!"

"Paris!" echoed Anderson. "And we—what do we have to pay for them?"

"The merest trifle," said Swayd. "You could pack it on your shoulders. You will pack it on them."

 IT WAS when they were climbing the last plateau below Ngononi's house that an innocent-looking liana rose oddly to meet Anderson's lifted foot. He pitched forward on his face and came up in a moment with six wiry little brown men fettering him.

Turning his head, he saw Swayd behind him, similarly garlanded.

Goldie cursed himself for a fool, and then he cursed Swayd. Swayd had finished telling him no less than an hour ago that danger was past. These natives, by all accounts, should be friendly. — him if they were though!

He flexed his muscles tentatively. No use! They had him properly.

"It's all right," came Swayd's voice. "They'll take us to Ngononi, and he'll turn us loose. Did the little beggars hurt you?"

"No!" he shouted.

Swayd's confidence was reassuring. And yet—unpleasant thought indeed!—why should Ngononi let them go? He had them, he had the trinkets, either way he played the game. He fervently hoped Swayd was right—but—he knew something of natives!

Oh, — them both for being such fools as to lower their guard! And in the meantime, — these stinking natives about his body!

Presently they reached the village.

From a hut, unobserved, Ngononi watched them critically as they passed. When they had gone he sat silent for a

moment. Then he nodded his owlish old head.

"Yes," he said gravely to himself, "it is the better head. Much the better head. There is no other quite like it."

And with creaking joints he rose and ambled off to his own, the devil-devil, house.

An hour later Goldie Anderson was brought there unbound and bidden by signs to be seated. Gingerly he squatted down, glancing fearfully about him. And suddenly he started up with a shudder and an exclamation of horror.

Over the fire on a fresh thong hung the gory head that had once been—Swayd!

Ngononi was speaking to him, grinning in a fashion meant to be pleasant but achieving only horribleness. Another native brought in a little heap of gorgeous skins, and then another, and then a third. The colors of them! They were worth—oh, Lord, how much wouldn't they be worth if he had them down on the safe beach?

He stared at them covetously. He almost forgot for the moment his terror.

"For many years," said Ngononi politely and untroubled by the knowledge that he was not understood, "he has brought me heads. Good heads. But now I have enough. Besides, the birds are becoming scarce."

"But of all the heads which he has brought me, and indeed they have not been few, he has not brought me such a head as his head. I am an honest man. I pay for that which I buy."

"For the superior excellence of this head therefore I add ten skins. And now you may go."

And presently Goldie Anderson understood by signs that the birds of Paradise were his and that he was free. The thing seemed quite impossible. He tested it at length by putting the skins in his empty canvas swag and walking away.

He passed out of the village—down the cleared slope—into the bush. By Heaven, he was free!

And just there Warari speared him from behind a clump of fern. Warari was a young man with his way yet to make. He had only one head hanging from his rafters, and it wasn't much of a head, as you might say, whereas this, on the contrary. . . .

The CAMP-FIRE

A
MEETING-PLACE
for READERS,
WRITERS
and ADVENTURERS



Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of heaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

UNDoubtedly this comrade will get most of the information he seeks. What one can't supply, another can. Doubtless, too, there are books on the subject and their titles will be welcome.

Ft. Worth, Texas.

For many long months I have puzzled over a most curious beauty spot in Texas and am coming to the Camp-Fire for help as others have before me.

DOWN in Concho County there is a little town by the name of Paint Rock that gets its name from huge boulders grotesquely painted, located in the bluffs. These rocks are situated about ten miles from Paint Rock and about a mile and a half from where the Concho River empties into the Colorado. The cliffs are about forty-five feet high. All over them are painted, in blood-red, astonishing and puzzling designs left by the Indians.

And although centuries have passed since being placed there, the designs are as bright and noticeable as ever. An outline resembling a church surmounted by a cross is recognizable. A drawing that looks like a ship is also to be seen. Two immense hands are clearly discernible. Another design would seem to represent a boy riding a buffalo.

Most conspicuous of all are the moon and sun designs. Others are so queer and so grotesque as to be nothing short of monstrosities.

DO ANY of the Camp-Fire know of any old-timer who lived in this part? Or any one who has knowledge of its history? Do you think these Indians were sun-worshippers? I would surely like to discover the paint formula of theirs. A buffalo-hunter first heard of these cliffs from friendly Indians whom he encountered. They told of cliffs of fire, and claimed that these bluffs gave forth smoke and fire for months at a time. His curiosity aroused, he proceeded with them and was shown the Paint Rock Cliffs. Since last September abundant amount of oil has been discovered there, which leads me to believe that the "Cliffs of Fire" were nothing more than petroleum seeps afire. Some one let me have an opinion on this.—CHAS. McCafferty.

OUR "Ask Adventure" editors don't claim to know it all, nor can they tell all they know in a single letter. They, and we office editors, are merely trying to give our people all the information we can manage to do, so we are glad to have Comrade

Erickson give some more data to our comrades from Washington, D. C., and Honduras. Also data on a district from an aviator's point of view is particularly welcome for naturally that is not part of our regular stock in trade, though one or two of our "AA" editors happen to have had aviation experience.

New York.

I don't believe it's customary for those in the flickering shadows at the outer circle of the Camp-Fire to attempt any further information to that given by those in the limelight in answer to the various questions asked in "Ask Adventure." If so, I'm going to break the precedent—if I'm allowed—so here goes:

THERE are two questions to which I might be able to add a few enlightening remarks; one, that of Captain H. F. Rothery of Washington, D. C., concerning the Florida Everglades; the other, Chas. E. Borden of Tela, Honduras, C. A., regarding Yucatan county, Mexico.

Personally I'm not an an adventurer, though some day I hope to qualify—Scandinavian blood, you see. The only things I can recount with any thrill are: when four and one-half years old sat on top of a five story washpole; at two years, ran away from home; at twelve, pulled out of the Hudson when sinking for the third time. Later, having my clothes frozen on me when the cake of ice I was drifting on in Great South Bay broke through and I had to swim for it; getting cured of "side-car pullmaning" which I had till then conducted on an extensive scale by getting locked up for two days; a load of salt-and-pepper for stealing apples in a farmer's orchard. While at sea, saw two ships blown up by "Fritz" and wished myself torpedoed, just for the experience of it. Passed Cape Hatteras Lightship as she was sinking from a U-boat shot. Mere escapades, those, compared to my latest and best—flying. Lived in the Florida Everglades for six months. Boasted no pilot (I was trained for an aerial gunner) could get me sick by stunting. Was given a chance to make my boast good—five consecutive loop-the-loops, and I counted nineteen "Immelmans" (which are still worse for the stomach) before I "threw up." Lord knows how many followed—I was too sick to die.

HOWEVER, by habitation in, and flying over them, I naturally know a little of the Everglades. I know of no place in the U. S. which has better, more enjoyable weather during the months of November to June. In the Summer, insects resembling muchly in body and bite the mosquito are numerous around dampy spots. Their bodies are small but their legs make them resemble spiders. They are not so voracious as they are pesky.

The Seminole Indians now number less than five hundred. Of the many I have seen, only one man and his wife and child ever bore the semblance of cleanliness. They are more or less of a dark yellowish color and look ugly. However reticent they are toward whites they will not harm one unless in a quarrel or in self-defense. They are a shiftless lot, the women doing most of the work. Their favorite color is plaid, the men wearing knee-length skirts of calico or gingham. I have seen only two

who wore shoes and socks. A number of white women have interested themselves in the welfare of the remaining Seminoles and often make trips to their camps in the 'Glades to teach their women. A white man can best make himself understood by gestures and signs.

THERE is a State Drainage Canal which runs from Lake Okeechobee due south to the Miami River which empties into the Bay of Biscayne at Miami. Down this canal the Indians pole their way in their long canoes to Miami where they trade their wares. For any one purposing a trip I would suggest the use of this canal. It is about fifty feet wide and thirteen feet deep half its length north to where a dredge is still at work deepening it to thirteen feet clean through to Lake Okeechobee which is some seventy odd miles north of Miami and west of Palm Beach. I have caught more fish in this canal in an hour than a large family could eat in a week (these I threw back again because I couldn't use more than two or three of them). Alligators abound in this canal. I have bathed and washed clothes amongst a bunch of them without being molested and thus from personal observation must say they will not attack any one unless they are angered or bothered. I have seen a man, single-handed and unaided except by a rope, capture a seven-foot alligator and walk away with him thrown over his shoulder.

RATTLESNAKES are the only things, that to me, take the joy out of the Everglades. They are too numerous to suit me. A fine motorboat trip would be from Tampa down the Gulf of Mexico to the mouth of the Caloosahatchee River (about fifteen miles south of South Boca Grande) past Fort Myers and into Lake Okeechobee cruising southeast along its banks until the canal is reached and drifting down it south to Miami. The Chamber of Commerce, Miami, Florida, will be glad to give important data about Dade and other county waterways. The Everglades soil is of the finest black muck and at the low land prices is a fine farm investment. The canal lends an easy access to market. Sisal growing is rapidly becoming an important industry in Florida. Let me add a warning to hunters. The rare and beautiful plumaged birds of the Everglades are protected by the State under heavy penalty of long jail sentences. The hunting around Lake Okeechobee can not be beaten.

AS TO friend Borden. I take it, being that he is at Tela, he is in the offices of the United Fruit Company and therefore has a pretty good knowledge of Spanish, which is necessary for a well-paying job in Progresso. The chief product is sisal, the export of which is controlled by the Commission Reguladora de Hennequen. The exporters must ship through the above, therefore there are no independent exporters. While Merida is the larger city, Progresso is the seaport.

The Commission Reguladora is owned by the Mexican Government and as far as I know is operated in Yucatan only and circulates its own money. A recent order that came to my notice through my connection with the Ward Steamship Company (where, incidentally, I handle the Progresso and Merida Agency accounts) worded as follows: "Effective in Yucatan, Mexico, November 15th, 1919. The Commission Reguladora Mercado

de Hennequen, the Chamber of Commerce, Hemp Growers and the Governor agree to liquidate Commission Reguladora paper money, formerly two pesos for one dollar U. S. Currency, and fixing in the meantime the rate of exchange at four pesos to One American Dollar. After November 15, pesos will cease to exist." It isn't quite clear to me yet just what this portends. As a parting tip—Steamship agents' salaries are somewhat in excess of seven thousand dollars a year, and competent agents are hard to get. Let me know how you make out.—HERMAN E. ERICKSON.

IN A letter beginning with some news about his friend Alaska Jack, Carleton F. Crippen writes concerning Wild Bill Hickok and then gives us the following:

Vancouver, Canada.

Another one of our old timers who is still living, or at least was when I saw him last in San Francisco in 1915, is Diamond Field Jack Davis. I saw his name mentioned in "Riley Grannan's Last Adventure."

When the author wrote about Jack saying "Knick, old boy, you mustn't talk that way. Guns are made to blow the other feller's brains out," he certainly was quoting Diamond Field from first-hand. "Old boy" was one of Diamond Field's favorite ways of speaking to a friend, and I believe he was a friend of every man who was in hard luck. He was so generous he gave away two fortunes, one made in Alaska, and another in Nevada, and later lost a fortune in Mexico, after escaping from thirty Mexicans when they were about to stand him and two companions against a stone wall to be shot.

DIAMOND Field Jack, to my notion, is one of the biggest-hearted men who ever lived, although he was a gunman and had several notches on his guns; and like Wild Bill there are some who will print him as a blackguard when he passes on to the long trail. Jack's good nature and willingness to help others often made him the goat. This was the case in the killing for which he was sentenced to be hung in Idaho. Governor Hunt who pardoned him was the brother of my old friend Tom Hunt whom I have written of before. Jack's pardon by Governor Hunt was made a political issue by the opposing party, and naturally the opposing party condemned Jack as a cold-blooded murderer.

Hunt, Diamond Field, myself and others intended taking the oldest stage coaches to the Fair in 1915 and run them with old long-haired drivers, but the jitneys scored us out, and since then I have lost track of Jack. Undoubtedly, when Old Jack passes on, his memory will be brought up at Camp-Fire, as he is a character known from South America to Alaska.—CARLETON F. CRIPPEN.

WHO can supply this comrade with a copy of the poem she wants?

Balboa Heights, C. Z.

I read the talks about the Camp-Fire with much interest, recalling my own good times about the camp-fires in the Rocky Mountains. Such memo-

ries serve to lighten the burden of life in cities and settled sections.

I WOULD like to ask a favor of the members.

About four years ago there appeared a poem in one of the newspapers in Washington, D. C., the theme of which was the farewell of a cowboy to his chum who is going East for a visit. The first line is "And so, farewell." It recalls their rides together, morning, noon and night, the howls of the wolves, etc., speaks of the call of the mother to all, "And Mother East is calling you, I know," but after a while it will all pall and he will return and everything will be fine "When we ride the range together, you and I."

I used the poem for a reading (I am a public reader) but lost it some way and have forgotten much of it. If any one can furnish me with a copy, I shall be most grateful.

That hidden gold-mine of the Apaches always holds the interest. I have been trying to get my mother to write to you what she learned of it while at San Carlos, Arizona.—CECILE CARTER.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom, Alexander Hull rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

Newberg, Oregon.

Your custom is mighty jolly. I've always enjoyed the last few pages of the magazine. "Enjoy" perhaps shouldn't be the word for pages so fraught with the stuff of life and death, with grim "lost" and "missing" notices. The potential fictional possibilities of those items have seemed to me tremendous. If one had the inside story of half a dozen of them, there might be material enough for a life's work. I take that aspect of it, because I take fiction seriously. As an interpretation of life—that protean, apparently insoluble problem. Still, if every man contributes his bit of data, and his quota of experience, honestly, telling the truth of it as he sees it, maybe in the end we shall get somewhere with the riddle.

THE adventure streak—rather late in life, for

I am thirty—is rather strong in me. It sounds strange to say that, when most of them have been vicarious. I wish I had something spectacular to offer in the way of adventures. I've seen more or less of life, of course, but mainly in its more civilized aspects; I've touched the shadowy border half a dozen times by the fever route, and once or twice have been in more or less physical danger—but that's all, and there's no thrill in it for any one else.

At any rate, greetings and good will I can send you—and do.

"THE Better Head" was purely and simply a brain-child. My knowledge of the South Seas is not a first-hand one, though, considering the number and quality of the second-hand sources I've consulted, it may not be such an inaccurate knowledge after all. I shall be young enough to admit that I liked the story, I enjoyed writing it—although I've written and sold quite a lot of tales—as much as anything I ever turned out. I liked the irony of it. I liked the old head-hunter. And I was fond of the enterprising young native of the last paragraphs, who had so little to do with the rest

of the story. There is a certain simplicity about the native mind that is tremendously attractive, I think.

WE'RE likely, for reasons of our own, to overrate the Caucasian. After all, analyzed according to the light that is in him, I don't think that he shines too brightly, particularly when you judge him by the reactions that take place when he's placed in juxtaposition with the natives. He has, of course, a constructive ability and trend of character that the others lack, and he's more alert mentally because his world is vastly more complex and demands alertness, and, failing to get it, promptly serves disaster.

Of course, the reason that the white men of this story appear to such disadvantage is because they were simply "bad eggs," whereas the natives were, by Papuan standards of their day, upright and moral men. A head-hunter isn't particularly terrible if you take the trouble to study him in the light of his race, his past and his beliefs. *Nganoni*, in his way, was a very good man, I take it. An accident of birth and environment and time made him a head-hunter. In Athens he might have chiseled at the bas-reliefs of the Parthenon. In Gotham he might have been a mural painter or an interior decorator. The white head-bargainer, of course, was either amoral, or a homicidal degenerate. In any case, he was a misfit, and quite as valuable hanging over the fire of *Nganoni's* devil-devil house in the serene high hills as anywhere else.

THE story came into my mind all at once, full-blown—I don't know how—in the latter part of 1918. I think that's all I can say about it—unless some indulgent reader should happen to want to ask about it, or criticise it, in which case I will do my best.—ALEXANDER HULL.

P. S. I was born in 1887 in Columbus, Ohio, attended the public schools of that city, Muskingum College, and the University of Pennsylvania. I've been on the coast here for a bit over ten years, am professionally (until I began writing a few years ago, at least) a musician. A number of my compositions have been published. I am at the head of the Music Department of Pacific College at Newberg. In the last four years I have sold and had published some seventy short stories.—A. H.

CONCERNING an Asiatic race that figures in some of the stories of his series Robert J. Pearsall tells us the following:

Palo Alto, Calif.

The Lolo territory is, I believe, entirely new in fiction—and almost new in Western knowledge. Its Asiatic appellation is "the land where the Chinese do not go." When I was in China it had been penetrated only once, by the D'Ollone expedition, about 1907. I remember I once conceived the idea of attempting it myself, in company with another young fellow who was the son of a missionary and as enterprising a chap as ever roved. However, that went the way of many other good plans. But I knew the country roundabout—where "Ghost Ruled" was really loud—pretty thoroughly, from some experience and much study. And everything is as I've written it, including the element of superstition. The Lolos do come down to raid the Chinese villages—and perhaps sometimes they have

been assisted by some such trickery as I described.—ROBERT J. PEARSALL.

HERE are the results of the readers' vote on the ten most popular stories in *Adventure* during 1919. As in previous years, we give also the ten ranking next in the vote. (S) stands for "serial," (N) for complete "novel," (n) for complete novellette, those unmarked being short stories.

Of course a vote of this kind is only a partial expression, being cast by only a minority of the total number of readers,¹ but nevertheless it is both interesting and decidedly useful in helping us in the office fill the magazine with the kinds of story our readers like best.

The vote on the relative value of fiction and the various departments was so scattering that we have not tabulated the results. "Camp-Fire" ran very strong, with "Ask Adventure" a good second. But no formal vote was needed to show that "Camp-Fire" is a favorite.

	Vote
1 LYNCH LAWYERS (S)	
<i>William Patterson White</i>	5,921
2 FROM BEHIND MASKS (S)	
<i>Gordon Young</i>	4,867
3 SAVAGES (S)	
<i>Gordon Young</i>	4,557
4 RIDER OF THE GRAY HORSE (n)	
<i>Harold Lamb</i>	3,999
5 ON THE TRAIL OF TIPPOO TIB (S)	
<i>Talbot Mundy</i>	3,751
6 SHRIEK OF DÛM (N)	
<i>Talbot Mundy</i>	3,565
7 RED BELTS (S)	
<i>Hugh Pendexter</i>	3,087
8 MULE-SKINNER—DYNAMITE (n)	
<i>C. M. Cosby</i>	3,069
9 THE HELLION (n)	
<i>Earl Ennis</i>	2,728
10 THE SLOTH	
<i>Arthur O. Friel</i>	2,604
11 THE BOSS OF MIRAGE (n)	
<i>E. S. Pladwell</i>	2,046
12 CARSON OF TAOS (N)	
<i>Hugh Pendexter</i>	2,029
13 BORN TO BE HANGED—BUT (n)	
<i>Gordon Young</i>	2,015
14 GO-AHEAD DAVIE (N)	
<i>Hugh Pendexter</i>	1,953
15 SALT OF THE SEA (S)	
<i>J. Allan Dunn</i>	1,829
16 GENTLEMEN OF THE NORTH (S)	
<i>Hugh Pendexter</i>	1,767
17 DOOM OF THE GODS (N)	
<i>Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur</i>	1,519
18 STAR OF EVIL OMEN (n)	
<i>Harold Lamb</i>	1,457
19 MAN TO MAN (S)	
<i>Jackson Gregory</i>	1,271
20 THE SNAKE	
<i>Arthur O. Friel</i>	1,225

Because shorter stories labor under a disadvantage in a vote of this kind, those under 20,000 words are listed separately, those under 10,000 being marked with a *.

STORIES UNDER 20,000

		Vote
1 THE HELLION	<i>Earl Ennis</i>	2,728
2 THE SLOTH *	<i>Arthur O. Friel</i>	2,604
3 THE SNAKE *	<i>Arthur O. Friel</i>	1,225
4 THE DEATH OF ZARI *	<i>L. Patrick Greene</i>	1,209
5 LOCAL OPTION IN LOCO LAND *	<i>W. C. Tuttle</i>	1,178
6 THE SPIDER *	<i>Arthur O. Friel</i>	1,116
7 THE STREAK OF LEAN	<i>Edgar Young</i>	1,054
8 FLAT BEHIND THE EARS	<i>Norman Springer</i>	1,041
9 THE SON OF A FOOL *	<i>Edgar Young</i>	1,023
10 THE LURE OF THE LODE *	<i>Stephen Chalmers</i>	999
11 SILVER SADDLE	<i>Everett Saunders</i>	992
12 WHILE RIVERS RUN *	<i>Farnham Bishop</i>	961
13 ROOF OF THE WORLD	<i>Harold Lamb</i>	937
14 BUMPS	<i>S. B. H. Hurst</i>	931
15 GODFATHER TO SATAN'S KITCHEN *	<i>Hapsburg Liebe</i>	878
16 COLOR OF HIS BOOTS *	<i>W. C. Tuttle</i>	868
17 CONVERGING TRAILS *	<i>Edgar Young</i>	782
18 PARIAS OF PIPEROCK *	<i>W. C. Tuttle</i>	775
19 PROMOTERS	<i>G. A. Wells</i>	651
20 MERELY BRUTE *	<i>George L. Catton</i>	620

Bear in mind the vote during the coming year and be marking down your favorites as you go along. The next vote will be on the stories that appear in the issues from First January 1920 to Mid-December 1920 inclusive. No qualifications are required for voting—only that you read at least one copy of the magazine. We want to get what you consider to be the ten best stories of the year, but if you want to vote for more than this number, or for less, all well and good. Be sure to make up your list with the best story first, second best second, etc.

YES, a good many subscribers to this magazine have had a pretty raw deal in failure of the magazine to reach them

regularly and on time. And we've been late very often in getting it on the stands. The worst of it is that we can't do much to help it, for most of the trouble is not our fault. Our Circulation Department makes mistakes like all other human beings, but if there were no trouble except what is due to their mistakes our circulation troubles since last Fall would be comparatively insignificant.

You can get part of the answer by casting back on your own personal experience these past months in the matter of mail gone astray. You don't always know about mail sent you that didn't arrive or mail sent by you that didn't arrive, but probably you've detected enough cases to know that mail service has not been up to par for some time. It has been so bad here that the Merchants' Association of New York has finally secured a Congressional investigation.

EXPRESS service, which covers part of the distribution to subscribers, has been at least equally sad here in New York. Being unable to handle their work on the usual basis, the express people imposed condition upon condition, which were met by us at great trouble and expense, until they finally stated they were unable to handle our shipments at all! Our company, with its parent company the Butterick, being next to the largest express shipper in New York City, were naturally hard hit, but even that knock-out blow was met. With trucks hired at one hundred dollars a day (bear in mind that all other New York shippers were up against the same difficulties) we hauled our various magazines across the Hudson and out to small towns in New Jersey not affected by the local congestion and shipped from there.

Incidentally this last stunt had its amusing and cheerful side. Express company agents got a percentage bonus on increased business in addition to salary. The percentage seemed to increase with the smallness of the town and the lack of promise of much increased business. Well, our big trucks began rolling in upon little commuting stations in Jersey. I like to picture the local agents' eyes bulging with surprise and joy at this wholly unexpected and very, very large increase of their local business—and bonus. To the express officials who promptly appeared at our offices the

next morning our man in charge replied blandly, "Yes, and it will be a — sight more today. Wait till we get things really started."

ADD to these little matters the other little matter of the strike of the local printers here last Fall. You and we have been paying the bill ever since—in the sad delay of all issues until, as already explained, we finally had to cut the Gordian knot by omitting our two May issues entirely in order to get back on schedule. Oh, believe me, we in the office have been having our own troubles. No one suffers more from such delays than do we.

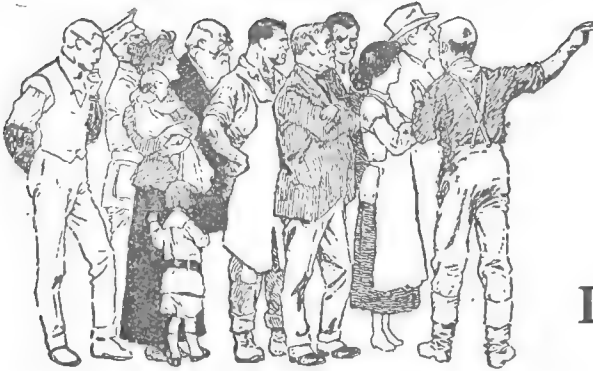
DID I ever tell you that two of our issues were printed in Boston in our attempts to make up time lost by the strike? Sounds simple enough. It wasn't. At the same time our own plant was working full time on other issues. Don't get me started on telling our troubles.

But bear them in mind when inclined to cuss over delays in subscriptions

and on newsstands. Conditions are by no means ideal yet at this writing in April. Picture our Circulation Department struggling against all the piled up troubles, for most of which they are in no way to blame.

Call out, by all means, whenever your magazine fails to reach you as it should. If you don't, we shan't even know about your trouble to rectify it. But don't forget that we have quite a little job on our hands, that we are not the ones most to blame for these troubles and, most of all, that we are the ones who suffer most from them and are doing all we can to remedy matters.

I WANT to thank very particularly those of you who responded to my appeal for reports of places where ADVENTURE should be on sale but wasn't and of insufficient supply to particular newsstands. That kind of friendly tip is more than appreciated and is invariably acted upon as quickly as conditions permit. Please keep on sending in those tips about our magazine.—A. S. H.



LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

ONE thing can be written down as sure. This country has been aroused to demand a more real democracy than it has ever had before, and it is going to get it. You need only look about for the proof. We are at last waking up to the fact that, in the actual working out of things, we have surprisingly little more than the name and some of the forms of democracy. The real control lies in the hands of a few. And these few have been carefully seeing to it that we got only denaturalized democracy.

To keep us quiet they feed us pap—pretty phrases and catch-words, appeals to surface patriotism, distorted and censored facts. Always they steer us away from anything that tends to take control out of their hands and put it into the hands of the people at large, where the control must lie if

we are to have a real democracy. Let citizens band together under any banner and for any purpose that tends to give them a really direct voice in their own governing and at once the few set to work to sap and wreck the movement. The newspapers begin printing "news" about it and in most cases that "news"—to say nothing of editorial expressions—begins showing that it is "dangerous," unpatriotic, fatal to our "sacred traditions," foolish, "idealistic," too radical, anything and everything it should not be. If that kind of propaganda isn't sufficient to wreck it, they turn to underground work to destroy its resources. Generally the movement doesn't survive. If it struggles through, they absorb it—gently and gradually take it under their own wing and denaturalize it.

WHO are the Few? Not just the capitalists whose tentacles reach in all directions through our social structure, but also the politicians, whose livelihood depends on being able to herd the people like sheep.

And there is a third class not so generally recognized and often not consciously opposed to real democracy—the economists, business men, efficiency experts, writers, manufacturers and others who insist upon considering man as an economic factor only, who make the fatal mistake of identifying economics with government. Economics is a part, not the whole, of man's functions and activities. If they would stop attempting to generalize from mankind as a whole long enough to realize that mankind as a whole is composed of individual men and can have only the characteristics derived from the individual men, they would see their theory fall to pieces before the fact that individual man has other motives and activities than those centered in economics. As is proved by millions of cases in which men deliberately sacrifice the demands of their bellies and their backs for the sake of things they deem more important. What would the race's history be without the millions who have sacrificed all material things, and life itself, for an idea, for others, for religion, for freedom? Yet the ultra-materialists persist in their impossible attempt to found government, which must be inclusive of all man's activities and motives, upon economics alone! (As to realizing the real truth—that the idea always and inevitably comes before the thing, creates it, shapes it, destroys it—having turned their backs upon it, they have no chance of seeing.)

Add to the Few who control us the people, those labor and other agitators who agitate, with this plea or with that, for some general change by which they hope to profit individually.

AND there you are. These Few control us, determine our actions or lack of action, mold our very opinions, use us to their own ends, prey upon us, herd us like sheep. Only one thing can break their hold upon us—real democracy. They know it. Therefore the one thing against which they guard most carefully is real democracy. They know that the real power lies with us. They know that we do not know it, because we are asleep. Therefore it is their job to keep us asleep. If we begin to awake, as we are doing at last, and to demand a bit more of real democracy, then their job is to feed us pap and lies, persuade us that this bit is really a dangerous and naughty thing and send us back to sleep again. If, as happens more often of late, we refuse to let go of our bit and go to sleep again, then they carefully and subtly denaturalize that bit of real democracy and leave us our labor, and a little loss of faith, for our pains.

For real democracy means real control by the people. And that would mean that the Few would lose their power. And their profits.

WHAT is real control by the people? First, freedom to express free opinion freely. Second, ability to enforce the majority of opinion upon government.

Free speech and free press, of course. But also a voting system that permits full, exact and formal voicing of the people's opinion.

A governing system in which fundamental power is with the people, of course. But also a system

which gives that fundamental power a real hold upon government, which makes it a *control*. It certainly isn't that now.

But the *power* is there! The Few never forget that. It is their nightmare. Their salvation demands that the people be kept from realizing that power. For if the people use it, the Few are lost.

And if the people don't use it, the people are lost. There stands the case.

AMERICANS are at last realizing the situation.

We are beginning to demand the real democracy we have not yet had. The whole world is beginning to demand it. Real democracy is an avalanche only part way down the hill. In our country the Few see it and strive more desperately than ever to stop it. They can not.

But they can postpone its coming. In postponing it they must put themselves in its path. And it will crush them. And by blocking lawful channels against it they can force it into unlawful paths.

Stating the case as it bears upon the Few, it is this: The people are tired of being exploited as sheep. So tired of it that at least part of them have become angry, even vicious. They are going to free themselves from your control. If you have sense enough to see the inevitable and turn your efforts to assist its coming, becoming of the people instead of against them, it will come in an orderly, lawful way, by degrees, wholesomely and beneficially to all. If you persist in fighting it, in keeping your "stand-pat," ultra-conservative attitude, it will come just the same, and it will come harder and with bitterness. You can not stop it with an ax. You can not stop it by lessening the democracy we already have. That is only damming the flood back into a greater volume of water that will overwhelm you in the end. You have your choice between allowing the people to take lawfully the real democracy, the real control, that lawfully should be theirs under any democracy, and having them take it anyway, probably too suddenly and too sweepingly, perhaps by violence and chaos. Choose.

STATING the case from the people's point of view, it is this:—We must have free speech and free press, but they are not enough. We must have also a voting system that registers our free opinion fully, exactly and lawfully upon government. This will make our fundamental power an active *control*. Until we get active control we do not have real democracy.

Our present voting system is so full of obstacles and holes that it is ludicrous as a real expresser of real public opinion. But it is ours, an integral part of our political, economic and social structure. That structure will suffer severely if any of its integral parts are violently or suddenly torn from it. The change must be gradual, lawful, intelligent.

But the change must be made and must be made more quickly than such changes are usually made. Else it may be made with violence by the unintelligent.

THERE is a means. A lawful means, quick yet working no violence to the present system of voting. The two can exist together, the better, or a combination of the two, surviving after an actual, practical test.

In the early days of society public opinion was directly expressed by individual voice at tribal council or, later, at New England town meeting. Ballot and standing laws were invented merely as *machinery* for expressing direct public opinion. Later they became practically the only methods, and gradually become so remote from the fundamental method that to large degree they ceased to register it exactly. With help, of course, from the ever-present Few who didn't want it to register direct actual public opinion any more fully than could be helped. The ballot system, as applied, became poor machinery for real democracy.

It need not be. Make it a more exact expression of direct public opinion and at once it becomes better machinery, though never more than machinery. The real voice is the direct voice.

The remedy in our present crisis is to go back to the direct voice itself. Give the people direct and full expression. It can be done only by organization. What we lack now is *organized public opinion*. Not organized as to forming opinion, but as to expressing it. The only way to organize it is to organize it.

LET the people begin forming citizen councils locally. As many units as possible in each locality, of whatever size seems best in the particular circumstances, including both sexes of all classes, parties and creeds without distinction. As soon as there are sufficient units in one town or county, organize them into larger units, these into still larger ones, and so on, the original bodies remaining the working units and retaining control. All units, groups of units and State and national organization being held tight to actual democracy and democratic methods—each individual citizen's voice being registered on each issue or candidate and in selecting them. Each working unit sends the vote of its members to the next higher unit, this higher unit to the next higher, Take a pencil and figure out its operation carefully and exactly from this mere outline of an amazingly perfect and simple piece of voting machinery. It can initiate and take a vote on any issue or man at any time, very quickly and at an almost negligible expense. As a guide and check for our representatives it is thoroughly efficient. And it is democracy. Not denaturalized democracy.

DO NOT make any mistake as to the effect of such a vote, as to the power of such an organization or of any of its local units. At first it would comprise only a very small part of the population but it would be that rare thing a part of the general population that *had a direct voice and used it*. If you have any doubt as to its powers, note how desperately the Few always strive to kill any and every attempt of this kind.

Let these units, in addition to their voting function, take up the definite work of teaching and establishing the fundamentals of real democracy. Not any "ism" or new theory, but the fundamentals of democracy upon which practically all of us agree but which we have not carried out logically in our practical affairs. Not attempting to *shape* public opinion on specific issues or men (except as they may chance to further or clash with a fundamental principle of democracy), but affording the means of *expressing* the public's opinion.

Power? Literally, all there is in a democracy. Public opinion is not only the heart and soul

of a democracy, but its one fundamental power. Organize its expression and nothing can stand against it.

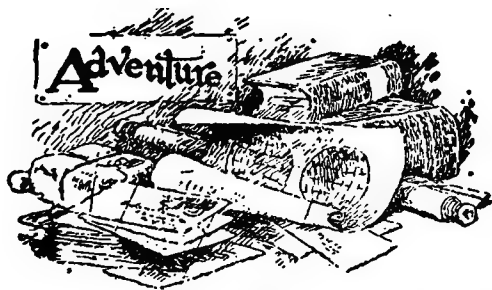
TO PRESENT so big and so complex a subject in brief space is impossible except in mere outline. Naturally it is not presented as a complete plan, nor is there space to array the convincing details or even to pound home the main principles. If you are sufficiently interested to turn it over in your mind for a week or two, you will find the details working themselves out.

Start your local Citizens' Council. If you care to register with me its name and address, I will act as a temporary clerk for keeping such records so that gradually units can be put into touch with one another, forming themselves into such larger groups as seem best to them, and eventually into a national organization. In one of our largest cities (not New York) there is forming a local organization which may serve as a national nucleus, able to perform various services that I will not specify until they materialize.

Remember, the only means of getting democracy is *democracy*. Don't wait for leaders to organize you from above. That is likely to spell autocratic method. Witness most "popular" organizations of today. *Organize yourselves* from the bottom up. That is democracy.

UNLESS some such machinery as this is quickly built to bring us real democracy by lawful democratic means the tremendous movement that is shaking the whole world is very likely to sweep us into sudden and violent changes that will spell chaos and disaster. You may think this or that about Bolshevism, but you can be sure that it is only one phase of a bigger wave of human change. To me it is a step forward and in the wrong direction. In the wrong direction because it is essentially materialistic, another victim of the fallacy that man is only a belly and a back, of the fallacy that government can be limited to economics alone; also because it does not put all citizens or all classes upon an equal basis or give to all an equal voice. Forward because, in theory, it puts more power into the hands of the people themselves, where it belongs in any real democracy. It should be very plain to those of you who have been reading this department the past year or more that I am no advocate of Bolshevism, but, though it may now have become treason for a free citizen of this country to express his free opinion, I do not hold with the fools who advance the cause of Bolshevism by accusing it of all the crimes in the calendar. It has advanced far because of the good in it, because of the real though sometimes twisted democracy in it, but the bad in it will wreck it in the long run. If for no other reason it is not practicable in America because it is not a natural development or expression of native traditions and genius, as it is in Russia.

BUT whether Bolshevism does or does not gain control here, some new system will gain control, and probably not by pleasant processes, unless we Americans turn to and develop our present system (which in its fundamentals is adapted to our genius) logically, firmly and fully until those fundamentals of real democracy are breathed into every part of our governing machinery and of our daily life as citizens.—A. S. H.



VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you, *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying*.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply *Adventure* back through 1918, and occasional copies before that.

WILL SELL: Oct. and Dec., 1912; Jan. to Nov. (inclusive), 1913; Jan., Feb., May to Nov. (inclusive), 1914; Apr. to Dec., (inclusive), 1915; Feb. to Oct. (inclusive), 1916; Feb. to May (inclusive), 1917; Apr. to Dec. (inclusive), 1919. Ten cents per copy for the lot.—Address P. H. MITCHELL, 297 Madison Ave., Bridgeport, Conn.

WILL SELL: July, Aug., Sept., 1915: all copies from April, 1916, to date. Fifteen cents each, not including postage. In lots of one dozen, \$1.50; not including postage.—Address Ed. S. RAHN, 1432 N. Allison St., Philadelphia, Pa.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be type-written double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of this issue.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, *post-paid*, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *unstamped* envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EDERLY, 1833 S St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure.")

Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for Adventure Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.



QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.
2. Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.
3. No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
4. Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.
5. Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.

1. ★ Islands and Coasts

CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1

BERIAH BROWN, Seattle Press Club, 1309 Fifth Ave., N.E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2

CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1

RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2

HAPSBURG LIEBE, 6 W. Concord Ave., Orlando, Florida. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3

DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Middle Western U. S. Part 1

JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, (lately CAPT. A. E. I.F.) care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially early history of Missouri valley.

8. Middle Western U. S. Part 2

JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bld'g., Chicago, Ill. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3

LARRY ST. JOHN, 1101 Kimball Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Lake Michigan. Fishing, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, clamming, early history, legends.

10. Western U. S. Part 1

E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

11. Western U. S. Part 2 and

Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs; topography, climate, natives, hunting, history, industries.

12. Mexico Part 2 Southern

EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougall Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering that part of Mexico lying south of a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, natives, commerce.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 1

S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 2

HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., covering south-eastern Ontario and the lower Ottawa Valley. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping.

15. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3

GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 4

ED. L. CARSON, Burlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

17. North American Snow Countries Part 5

THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

18. North American Snow Countries Part 6

H. S. BELCHER, The Hudson's Bay Company, Ft. Alexander, Manitoba, Canada. Covering Manitoba, Saskatchewan, MacKenzie and Northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel.

19. North American Snow Countries Part 7

JAS. P. B. BELFORD, Richmond, Quebec. Covering New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper and wood-pulp industries, land grants, water-power.

20. Hawaiian Islands and China

F. J. HALTON, 632 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

21. Central America

EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougall Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

22. South America Part 1

EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure Magazine*, Spring and Macdougall Sts., New York, N. Y. Covering Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

23. South America Part 2

P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Covering Venezuela, The Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, natives, languages, hunting and fishing.

24. Asia, Southern

GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

25. Philippine Islands

BUCK CONNOR, Box 807A, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, N. M. Covering history, natives, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, exports and imports; manufacturing.

26. Japan

GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Maine. Covering Japan: Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

27. Russia and Eastern Siberia

MAJOR A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Austin, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

28. Africa Part 1

THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria, Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

29. Africa Part 2

GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

30. ★ Africa Part 3. Portuguese East Africa

R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

31. ★ Africa Part 4. Transvaal, N.W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda and the Upper Congo

CHARLES BEADLE, care Society of Authors and Composers, Central Buildings, Tothill St., Westminster, London, England. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

32. ★ New Zealand and the South Sea Islands

TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

33. ★ Australia and Tasmania

ALBERT GOLDIE, Hotel Sydney, Sydney, Australia. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

FIREARMS, PAST AND PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should not be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district in question.)

A.—All Shotguns (including foreign and American makes). J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers (including foreign and American makes). D. WIGGINS, Salem, Ore.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; live bait; camping outfits; fishing trips.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen. Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash. D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

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Eastern South America

HERE are invaluable tips to those whose eyes have turned toward our Latin American neighbors — information which may some day save you thousands of dollars and months of failure. Mr. Goldsmith covers his entire territory for the benefit of those whose general knowledge of the country is vague, but whose interest in its opportunities is intense:

Question:—"I will be grateful if you can help me with the following questions on South America. I intend making a stay there of about two years and maybe more if successful.

What equipment would you advise, such as fire-arms and clothing?

What, in a general way, are the trade and agricultural opportunities in the following countries:

Venezuela, Brazil, the Guianas, and Uruguay?

Which of the above countries would be your first choice?

Are there any public lands to be had and what are the conditions under which they could be obtained?

About what would be the cost of same per acre in the various countries?

What would be the best crops to grow the first few years in the different countries and are there good markets available?

Do you think it would pay to get out lumber for export? About what would the cutting rights cost?

What in your estimation would be the minimum capital required?"—C. A. MURRAY, Grimsby, Ont., Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Goldsmith:—As to equipment of fire-arms and clothing: South America is nearly as large as North America, and it has every climate that exists in the world, and every social condition. In the centers of life in any of the countries fire-arms are wholly unnecessary. If you go into the wild country, you might have a good pistol, say of .45 caliber, and a repeating rifle .38 to .45. If you expect to do gunning, a 10-gage shotgun might be desirable.

As to clothing: this would depend entirely upon where you expected to be. South of the equator, the seasons are reversed: the Summer occurs in December, January and February, and the Winter in June, July and August, while Spring and Autumn change places. In the lowlands of Colombia, Venezuela, the Guianas, northern Brazil, Ecuador, Paraguay and Peru you would need very light clothing, about as in Florida; in the higher regions of all countries, and, in general, in Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Bolivia and southern Brazil, where they have real Winter, you need such clothing as would be proper in Virginia or Tennessee, where the climate is cold in the Winter, but much milder than in Canada.

In Venezuela, the chief industries are agriculture and fruit raising. All the cereals are grown, and coffee and sugar are produced in great quantities. I doubt if there would be there a particularly good opportunity for a foreigner, unless he could take

sufficient capital with him to develop a business for himself.

The Guianas are more primitive. They are thoroughly tropical and the products, in general, are the same as in Venezuela. There are opportunities for gold mining and washing, and taking up land, particularly in British Guiana.

Uruguay is highly developed in the industrial sense, agriculture and cattle-raising being the chief industries. Apart from employment with existing industrial or agricultural establishments, I think the opportunities in Uruguay are not so good as in some of the less developed countries.

Brazil, of all the countries mentioned, seems to me to offer the greatest number and variety of opportunities.

There are public lands, and prices vary somewhat according to the desirability of the land, but mainly in proportion to its proximity to the settled centers. Assuming that you will be most interested in Brazil, let me say that there are rich public lands that can be taken up at very slight cost by a genuine immigrant, that is, one who goes to the country to settle and to work the land or have it worked, but not to buy it and resell as a speculation. If you are interested in this, I suggest that you write to the Exmo. Sr. Ministro de Agricultura, Industria e Commercio, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, asking him to give you information regarding laws, grants, locations, etc. Prices vary much at the present time.

It is difficult to answer the question as to what are the best first crops until one knows what are going to be the second crops. There are good markets near the cities and along the railways. Of course, if one goes far into the undeveloped regions, the markets for certain things are not good. If one raises sugar cane in an isolated place, he can readily manufacture the sugar, beginning on a small scale, and, as sugar is a valuable product in proportion to its weight, it can always be transported to the markets, even on mules. If one is going to grow coffee or bananas, which require from four to six years to become productive, he can plant corn or beans on the same ground. Cane becomes productive after two years. The cereals are the same as in the United States. Cotton, grown in southern Brazil, behaves much the same as in the United States, although in some places it continues to produce from year to year for several years together.

Regarding the getting out of lumber: this applies to Brazil, Venezuela and the Guianas. Unless one could go into the business on a large scale, with plenty of capital, and with transportation facilities of his own, the enterprise would be difficult. Brazil has splendid forests, even near some of the cities, as in the case of Belem (Pará), but, owing to the lack of cheap transportation, they are allowed to stand. There would be great opportunity for knowing people with plenty of capital to develop an enormous business in this respect. Regarding cutting rights, you ought to write to the same gentleman whose office I gave you above.

Regarding what ought to be a minimum capital, of course I can say nothing without knowing what the business is to be. I have answered this question with respect to lumber.

Let me say, based upon long experience in Latin American countries, that there are many opportunities for the person who has capital, good judgment and energy, and who is willing to go to the place where he invests his capital and *stay with it*.

Into the Florida Everglades

MANY think southern Florida has the best small-game hunting grounds in the United States. Certainly the variety of one's kill would be great; and there is always the chance of meeting up with a buck or panther. Moreover, the Everglades are not scoured by hunters like most of our best regions:

Question:—"Five of us are planning to take a trip through the Everglades of Florida, hunting and fishing as we go. Would such a trip be practicable?"

What sort of game would be run into and would a license be necessary?

What sort of arms and equipment would be needed?

Would guides be necessary?

Where can I obtain a good map of Florida?

What sort of camera would you recommend?

What would it cost for guides, boats, supplies, etc., for a ten weeks trip?"—SCOTT ARMSTRONG, Camaguey, Cuba.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—A trip through the Everglades, hunting and fishing, would be, I think, practicable. Others have done it. As to game, you will find deer, turkey, perhaps a small black bear or a panther, squirrel, quail, woodcock, snipe, etc. A license is necessary, and that of a non-resident costs \$15. Also you should acquaint yourself with the game laws. The Florida State Game Warden, Tallahassee, will send you gratis a pamphlet copy. The season opens, I think, November fifteenth and closes March first.

Concerning equipment. Don't take anything you won't positively need. You will need a tent, a blanket, a change of clothing or so, emergency medicines (which should include a hypodermic and permanganate of potassium for possible snakebite; see a doctor about this), food supply, cooking utensils. Put salt and matches, the latter named in a water-tight container, at the top of your list. For shooting, I would take a repeater shotgun, 30-inch barrel, 12-gage, using different sizes of shot for different sizes of game. For fishing, I would take a good steel casting-rod, 26-pound test black lines, with green scale-effect floater "Zaragosa" plugs, and red-spotted "South Bend" wabblers plugs. Use the green on a bright day and the red on a dark day, preferably. I would take also a good flyrod, heavy weight, using small white spoons with pork rind. A small ax wouldn't be amiss on this trip. Neither would a poncho.

The best trips I know of went out from Fort Myers. Yes, guides are necessary, very much so. The guides usually furnish a wagon and mules, tent, and dogs, and they charge anywhere up to \$15 per day.

Any book store ought to be able to furnish you with a Rand-McNally map of Florida. These are as good maps as I know.

I am not well posted on cameras. I should say any of the better kinds would be all right.

"What will it cost for guides, boats, etc., for a ten weeks trip?" You've got me there. So much depends on so many things, you know. I never knew a party such as yours to stay in the 'Glades

for so long. But it will be expensive, and it will cost you more than you figure on at the start, I'm pretty sure; such things always do.

You ought to have a ripping time on this trip, if you go at it in the right way. I'm wishing you good luck.

In the above, I rather took it for granted that you know how to cast, bait and fly. If you don't, better learn before you start! Neither is the very easiest thing in the world to do.

The Ross Rifle

USUALLY it doesn't pay to buy a rifle of foreign make, both because of the price and difficulty in getting ammunition and spare parts. What's more, we make the best rifles in the world, right here in the U. S. A. Mr. Wiggins, by the way, promises that we may soon expect a .27 caliber piece with the remarkable velocity of 3,200 feet seconds. Still, the Ross is a mighty fine arm and embodies some exceptionally good features, including its peculiar bolt:

Question:—"I would certainly appreciate any information you could give me regarding the Ross rifle, .280 cal. Would like to know it's muzzle velocity, range for accuracy, energy, weight and where one could be bought and the price."—W. R. WAGNER, JR., Cross Plains, Texas.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins.—The Ross rifle is made by the Ross Rifle Company, Quebec, Canada. The gun is operated by a straight pull, the bolt being operated by a sleeve having a motion similar to the outside sleeve of the self-acting or automatic screw-driver; the sleeve having slots that engage with lugs on the bolt, thus causing it to revolve when the sleeve is pulled to the rear by the operator. The bolt-head is of the interrupted screw type, and its strength is proven by the fact that as far as is known, no Ross bolt has ever blown out.

The velocity is stated by the makers as being 3100 feet seconds, but other sources credit it with about four hundred feet less. Its range is great, the longest range shooting ever recorded at Bisley being done with the Ross and the 180 grain pointed bullet.

The energy is stated by Newton as being 3,002 foot pounds at the muzzle, and hold this average well up to a thousand yards, the latter range showing 319 foot pounds.

The rifle weighs about eight pounds, in the sporting model, and can be furnished for less weight if so ordered, I understand. I hear the recoil is very severe, though.

Post & Floto, New York, N. Y., were the agents at the last time I saw an advertisement. The price before the war was \$55. I think it will now cost more, and ammunition is selling at \$2.30 per box of twenty. I fear the rifle, being a foreign made one, would cost with duty, tax, etc., about a hundred dollars.

Now, here's a tip: soon there will be on the market a rifle made by our most prominent rifle makers, and giving in .27 caliber a velocity of 3,200 feet seconds. Why not wait a few months and get one of them?

British Columbia Calls Sportsmen

FEW places equal the Quesnel district for a month's canoeing, hunting and fishing. It is deep in the big woods yet near a good base of supply, easily reached yet far from civilization as most of us know it:

Question:—"You will greatly oblige a brother comrade of Camp-Fire and an old reader of *Adventure* if you will favor him with all the information at your command regarding Quesnel Lake in British Columbia.

I am particularly desirous of ascertaining information along the following lines: wild or civilized country; climate; length; breath; elevation; accessibility and route from Eastern United States; navigable for canoes; nearest town or settlement; game and fish in region of the lake; authoritative map of either lake, district around it or one of British Columbia showing it—where obtained; fish and game laws of British Columbia; best place to obtain outfit—States or Canada—for month's pleasure trip; essentials you consider necessary."—G. E. SANDERSON, Newark, N. J.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—The country around Quesnel Lake may be called a civilized wilderness, for quite a number of settlers have located there in the past few years; but not enough to hurt the hunting. The climate is all right from the middle of May till the middle of September. Beyond these periods you travel at your own risk. I might also add that you are liable to have a cool night any time during the year, since Summer frosts are no curiosity. It is very pleasant in the Summer and endurable in the Winter owing to the dryness. Go in from Ashcroft on the Canadian Pacific Railway. Your local railway agent will route you through and give you a better idea of the cost than I could.

Now, get this straight: There is the Quesnel River that comes into the Fraser at Quesnel, a small city. Up this river nearly fifty miles is what is known as Quesnel Forks, the junction of the North and South Forks of the Quesnel River. The north fork drains Cariboo Lake while the south fork comes from Quesnel Lake, about ten miles above the forks. The lake proper is about seventy-five miles long, so you will readily perceive that you can have all the canoeing your heart desires. It is a beautiful sheet of water and I am told that there are now small ranches scattered along the shores, especially on the north arm.

I think you will find the Soda Creek-Big Lake road to the Forks your most direct route in, although there is another one by way of 150 Mile House and the Horse-fly River. You will be able to get full information at Ashcroft—better than I could give it, since things have changed so on account of the war.

As for outfit, you can get everything you need at the Forks or Soda Creek, while there are several places along the route where necessities may be obtained in the event of running short. It is better to get what you require as close to your field of operations as possible and no difficulty will be experienced in outfitting right on the ground at a cost which makes packing in look silly.

There is fine fishing throughout the entire district and some walloping old trout have been caught here. As for game: grouse and chicken are everywhere, and so is the mule-deer. Duck and goose are also plentiful, while bear are by no means scarce. I have heard of caribou being shot there, but have never seen them. This, however, is no proof whatever that they are not to be found, for when nearly every other sort of game is in evidence they might well be among those present. The Horse-fly and Quesnel Fork districts are especially good, and if you get hungry there is always the rabbit. You are also liable to run across an occasional lynx.

As for a map, you can get one free by applying to the Deputy Minister of Lands, Victoria, B. C. There is a splendid one that was called "Pre-emptor's Map, Quesnel Sheet," which it might be well to mention when writing. The Provincial Game Warden, Vancouver, B. C., will send you a copy of the game laws, on application, which give you the proper method of procedure in bringing out trophies, fees and so forth.

You are certainly headed for the right district in which to spend a month or so, and if there is anything further you require along the lines of information write Art Sampson, 150 Mile House, B. C., or E. Milburn, Quesnel, B. C.

New Brunswick for New Homes

THE question has often been asked of late, "Is the pioneer spirit of America dead?" We offer this letter as evidence that it is not. And it is but one of several thousand such which we have received in the past two years:

Question:—"I am contemplating going to north-eastern Canada in the Spring and would be glad of any information in regard to conditions there. Having had twenty-five years' experience in trapping wolves and other predatory animals in the cattle and sheep country of the West, also in farming in a small way, I would of course seek information in regard to these two subjects.

Could I get a homestead where it is rather isolated and where there would be some game and fur-bearing animals, and would any kind of feed for milk cows, horses or chickens grow there? Could a man keep cows and horses there on account of climate? Does any kind of fruit grow there, and is there any good fishing where a man could get a home?

How about transportation and building material? Am thoroughly acquainted with camp life and making the best of things. If there is timber I can build a house. What I want is a place where we won't be crowded, for we (my wife, ten-year-old boy and myself) love Nature in her natural state. I was raised on the frontier, but it is getting too civilized for us.

What kind of timber, game and water may we expect to find?"—WALTER L. DAVIS, Roanoke, Va.

Answer, by Mr. Belford:—Your past experience should fit you, certainly, for life in the wilder parts of this country. I have had twenty years in the West, and, while conditions are very different, the training of a man's own self to meet and overcome hardship or difficulty is a big asset anywhere.

Judging from your letter I would recommend the counties of Victoria and Northumberland, in the Province of New Brunswick. Homestead lands, 100 acres, are obtainable at a nominal price of \$1 per acre, payable in four years. The country is timbered, but once cleared makes fine farming land. All the usual crops are grown—hay, wheat, oats, barley and roots. This province is especially noted for its superior Irish potatoes. Dairying is also an important industry. Of course you realize that to get into the game region you enter the timber lands, and such land takes time to bring under cultivation. Fruit, wild and tame, can be had in abundance.

You can erect your buildings from the timber on your own land. White, red and black spruce, fir, white and red pine, and cedar are the principal soft woods, and maple, beech, ash and birch the hardwoods.

As for fish and game, the country is a veritable

sportsman's paradise. There are many salmon streams preserved, leased to wealthy clubs, but there are many others where a bona-fide resident of the province may fish freely. Salmon and trout are the chief game fish, but there are many others of lesser fame. Moose, deer, bear, caribou, fox, lynx, wildcat, beaver, otter, mink, fox, raccoon, fisher, ermine, etc., are to be found. Ducks and geese partridge, snipe and woodcock among the birds.

Before proceeding further I would advise you to write the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Lands and Mines for copies of their publications, which they will send freely. Address: Fredericton, N. B., Canada. I have said nothing of the Province of Quebec in this letter. It offers equal opportunities for sport and settlement, but a knowledge of the French language is almost a necessity if one is to settle in the newer parts of the Province.



LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

PRICE, "SLIM." Of Cleveland, Ohio. Please write to R. HERMAN, care of Seamen's Home, 25 South St., New York, N. Y.

MILLER, DICK. Of a small Kentucky town. Please write to R. HERMAN, care of Seamen's Home, 25 South St., New York, N. Y.

GIVEN, JOHN. Age fifty-five. Was last heard of in St. Lawrence County, New York, in 1910. His sister's boy would like to learn his whereabouts.—Address ANDREW J. DAVIS, 701 Myrtle Ave., Bridgeport, Conn.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all un-found names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

GILLY, THOMAS. Last heard of in 1908; then in the 26th U. S. Infantry, Company I. Any information will be appreciated.—Address CHAS. ELDERS, City Hospital, Kansas City, Mo.

CLINGHAM, CHARLES. Left Buffalo, N. Y., in November, 1919, with Charles Moore for the West or Cleveland, Ohio. Write to your old friend.—Address JOS. GLENCZEWSKI, Route 2, Box 178, Forks, N. Y.

WILMONT, F. B. Locomotive Engineer. Last heard of five years ago; was traveling engineer on Guayaquil and Quito Railroad at Bucuy, Ecuador, S. A. Any one knowing his whereabouts, either dead or alive, please communicate with CHARLES EICHHOLZER, Morrow, Warren County, Ohio.

LOWRY, DANIEL. Last seen in the fall of 1914 near Winnipeg, Canada. His signature wanted on legal papers. Twenty-five dollars will be sent to the person sending this man's present address.—Address JOBE KENNEDY, Clear Lake, Iowa, or AIKINS, LOFTUS AND AIKINS, Winnipeg, Canada.

McCORMICK, THOMAS C. Of a small Kentucky town. Please write to R. HERMAN, care of Seamen's Home, 25 South St., New York, N. Y.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

WILSON, GEORGE. Last heard of in Chicago and in St. Louis in February, 1920. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address H. STUART MORRISON, 479 East 7th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

OGG, LINWOOD C. Last heard of in Chicago and St. Louis in February, 1920. Any information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address H. STUART MORRISON, 479 East 7th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

DUNN, ARTHUR A. Last heard of in Miami, Ariz., November, 1918. Is a civil engineer by trade. Any information as to his present whereabouts will be appreciated.—Address CHARLIE R. JOHNS, 30 N. Franklin St., Washington, Pa.

WILSON, VIRGIL ELWOOD. Member of Alpha Tau Omega college fraternity, initiated at University of Missouri. Last heard of was in Billings, Mont. Tramped with me in Colombia. Write your old pal and fraternity brother.—Address O. D. RUSSELL, 1117 Messanie St., St. Joseph, Mo.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all un-found names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

CHESWORTH, THOMAS. Can any one aid two young ladies of Cheshire, England, to find their father? Left home to come to U. S. and was last heard of in New York City in 1915. If you have any knowledge of the above, please communicate with HARRY P. SAUNDERS, Box 959, Ardmore, Okla.

SIEGFRIED, OTTO. Husband. Disappeared August 4, 1919, from home in New York City. Was out of work at time. When employed he is a marine machinist. Height six feet two inches, weight 168 pounds, light curly hair, gray eyes, age twenty-three. Any information will be appreciated.—Address **MRS. E. M. SIEGFRIED, 92 Appleton St., Boston, Mass.**

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BOHLER, EDDIE L. "Kid" Bolan. Five feet, six inches tall, light hair, blue eyes, weighs about 160 pounds. Has American eagle and flag tattooed on left arm. Born in Newark, N. J. Was an amateur boxer. Enlisted in Army in 1916 and went to France in 1917 with the artillery, where he stayed about nineteen months. Uncle in Canada has left him property. Any information will be appreciated.—Address **HARRY MORFITT, Waterville, Kings Co., Nova Scotia, Canada.**

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the First June or Mid-June issues of Adventure. They can get the name of the inquirer from this magazine:

ASHTON, ROBERT NEWTON; Barker, Donald; Bel-lows, Fred L.; Brice, Edward; Clifton; Bundy, Ellis; Butler, Harry; Campbell, Jenner S.; Carson, James; Colfar, Annie; Covington, Wm. G.; Curry, Jas. F.; Donnegan, Charlie; Douthright, Frederick and William; Doyle, John; Eklund, Nellie DeCloud; Fairbanks, Luther S.; Greely, Pearl Adam; Green, James; Harding, Dick; Helle-son, Thomas; Hester, Clifford E.; Hickok, Parke; Jones, Ralph; Kroh, H. D.; Kromer, Raymond; Lee, D. P.; Lorak, Edward; Lynch, Eddie; Mills, Frank B.; Mills, Joseph; Mouch, Pearl McCandless; Mullin, Michael; Painter, Frank B.; Perry, Jim; Russell, Wm. Jefferson; "Slippery Slim"; Stokes, Vincent; Walter; Stover, Jack; Strempel, H. E.; Thomas, Mrs. S. S.; Treber, Birch; Vandenberg, Thomas; Vestle; Wilkinson, Fred W.; Wobber, George and Adolf.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Jack P. Robinson; Roy Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; O. B. Franklin; Lieut. Wm. S. Hilles; G. H. Atkins; G. E. Hungerford; A. Caylord; E. J. Moran; F. S. Emerson; E. Murphy; H. E. Copp; J. Dunn; J. Higmon; E. Cunningham; Dennis F. Crolly; L. E. Patten; T. T. Bennett.

UNCLAIMED mail is held by Adventure for the following persons, who may obtain it by sending us present address and proof of identity.

BEATON, SGT.-MAJOR G. M.; Benson, Edwin Worth; Bonner, Major J. S.; Mrs. Brownell; Carpenter, Capt. Robert S.; "Chink"; Coles, Bobby; Cook, Elliot D.; Cook, William N.; Cosby, Arthur F.; Crashley, Wm. T.; Eager, Paul Roman; Erwin, Phil; Fairfax, Boyd; Fisher, Edward E.; Fisher, Sgt. R.; Garson, Ed.; Green, Billy; Green, W.; Hale, Robert E.; Harris, Walter J.; Hart, Jack; Harwood, J.; Hines, Joseph; Hoffman, J. M.; Hughes, Frank E.; Hunt, Daniel O'Connell; Jackson, Robert R.; Kohlhammer, Jack; Koltzau, John; Kuckaby, William Francis; Kuhn, Edward; Kutcher, Sgt. Harry; Laffer, Mrs. Harry; Lancaster, C. E.; Larisey, Jack; Lauder, Harry; Lee, Capt. Harry A. R. C.; Lee, Dr. William R.; Lewis, Warburton; "Lonely Jack"; Lovett, Harold S.; McAdams, W. B.; McGrath, Jack W.; MacDonald, Tony; MacNamee, Alva I.; Madsen, Sgt. E. E.; Martel, Leon H.; Nelson, Frank Lovell; O'Hara, Jack; Parker, G. A.; Parker, Dr. M.; Parrott, Pvt. D. C.; Phipps, Corbett C.; Rich, Wagoner Bob; Rinkenbach, Frank; Rundle, Merrill G.; Schmidt, G.; Scott, Pvt. James F.; Stremple, H. E.; Swan, George L.; Tripp, Edward N.; Van Tyler, Chester; Von Gelucke, Byron; Ward, Frank B.; Wheeler, S. H.; Williams, W. P.; Woon, Basil D.; Zorek, Leon; J. C. H.; L. T. 348; S 177284; 439; WS-XV.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address E. F. BRACE, care Adventure.

THE TRAIL AHEAD MID-JULY ISSUE

Besides the three novelettes described on the second contents page, you will find these ten stories in the next issue:

WOOD AND STEEL

The story of a war-ship, built in the Arthur Administration, when the U. S. Navy ships were of wood and its men were of steel.

By Farnham Bishop

A BLAMED GOOD POLICEMAN

"If a cop ain't straight with himself he ain't straight with nobody else," remarks *Policeman Bob Farley*. But that was before he had the chance to pick up some easy money.

By G. A. Wells

THE CALL OF THE CRIMSON STAR

Deep in the wilds west of the Hudson's Bay fur-trading post, *Arthur Hendry* finds an unexpected danger, a danger that many years ago had forced him to leave England and seek a new existence in a place where the clutching fingers of the law could not reach.

By Samuel Alexander White

THE WEAKNESS OF MEN

Army life is idle life at lonely posts; but when to idleness is added the Weakness of Men, then trouble is sure to result.

By Clyde B. Hough

THE ANT-EATER

It is a peaceable animal, and silly-looking, but it can fight with ferocity and cunning. In the jungles of Brazil there lives a man who looks and acts like an ant-bear, and when he is crowded too far his assailants do not live long enough to be sorry.

By Arthur O. Friel

THE TROUBLE-SHOOTER

When this old desert-rat joins forces with Gila City's defenders of law and order he proves conclusively that he is a Trouble-Shooter.

By E. S. Pladwell

MUD

Maje is a horse whose speed is apparent only on a muddy track, so when he arrives in Arizona and is entered in the Copper Mile his backers decide that nothing but a cloud-burst can keep him in the race.

By Romaine H. Lowdermilk

THE MAN WHO STAYED

Scoundrel or hero—who can say how he will act in the Big Minute that comes to all of us at least once?

By L. Patrick Greene

TWO EXCUSES

One of the two might survive; both could not, yet each must make excuses for his own decision.

By George L. Catton

WULFHIRE Part IV

In which *Wulfhire* fights with *Penda*.

By A. B. Higginson





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Only for ladies who end corns

Dainty shoes are only for those who end corns.

The way is simple, quick and easy, and is sure. Millions of people employ it.

Apply Blue-jay, the liquid or the plaster. That touch will stop the pain.

Then wait a little, and the corn will loosen and come out.

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keep them. Or they pad them. Or they use a treatment harsh and ineffective.

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Year after year, it is keeping millions entirely free from corns.

Perhaps half the corns that start are now ended by it.

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The Scientific Corn Ender

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Garrison, a young prospector in Alaska, gets into a drunken row in Moll's Place, a mining-town saloon, where he goes to forget his bad luck in prospecting. How he pulls himself together mentally and physically and how—but read it for yourself in the July number of

ROMANCE

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author of "Spoon River Anthology"

and nine short stories—the complete equivalent of two full-sized books of the best fiction. Get *Romance* for July. Twenty-five cents a copy.

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